United Nations A/52/PV.19

General Assembly

Official Records

Fifty-second Session

19th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 1 October 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko ..... (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: The first speaker is the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, His Excellency Mr. Vu Khoan.

Mr. Vu Khoan (Viet Nam): On behalf of the Vietnamese delegation, I wish to warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. I am confident that under your wise guidance this session will be crowned with many fine results.

I should like also to express the appreciation of the Vietnamese delegation for the active work done by Mr. Razali Ismail, President of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, a session that marked new strides on the United Nations journey to fulfil its mandate in contributing to peace and development in the world as a whole.

May I take this opportunity to warmly congratulate Mr. Kofi Annan, who, within a very short span of time since assuming the very important post of Secretary-General of the United Nations, has managed to accomplish a large amount of work, including efforts related to reform of the United Nations in the light of the profound changes in the world, in response to the aspirations of peoples with regard to our global Organization.

Mankind is rushing towards the end of the twentieth century and preparing to enter the third millennium with an earnest desire for a more tranquil and better life. That desire becomes even more earnest when we look back at the last century, a century that has been darkened by the black clouds of two world wars and countless conflicts, large and small. That desire becomes even more urgent given that the boundless mind of man has produced numerous miraculous inventions, opening up a new era called the "post-industrial era" or "the information age", while more than a quarter of the developing world's population still lives in poverty, some 840 million go hungry or face food insecurity, and even in industrial countries more than 100 million people live below the poverty line and 37 million are jobless.

Under these circumstances, it is understandable that all nations see the need to consolidate peace and promote development as their primary priority so as to turn the twenty-first century into a century with fewer conflicts and less poverty.

Peace and development are companions; they go together like the two sides of a coin. Sustainable development is only possible if it is built upon the solid premise of a durable peace: peace for all nations, peace for every region and peace for the entire planet. Here, we fully subscribe to the views expressed in the Agenda for Development: development is a prerequisite for peace, and at the same time peace is a precondition for development.

97-86116 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

We may take satisfaction from the fact that, during the past year, a series of events have shown that the trend towards peace is continuing. Political solutions have been found for a number of decades-old conflicts. Relations between various nations, including the big Powers, have seen some partial improvements. Following in the footsteps of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) entered into force. The South-East Asia nuclear-weapon-free zone (SEANWFZ) has come into existence.

In spite of all this, the world's people still cannot be assured of a lasting peace if that peace is not constructed on an equitable premise. It is truly unfair that a few countries are entitled to maintain an absolute superiority, which even enables them to use their power to impose their will on other countries, while many countries have to live in the fear of insecurity. In this context, we hold that there is still a need to free our planet from the burden of nuclear weapons, to ban, totally and resolutely, the production, storage, threat and use of this most horrible and lethal type of weapon. In the same context, we expect the nuclear-weapon States to sign the protocol annexed to the SEANWFZ soon, in order to strengthen the power of the Treaty, thereby making a viable contribution to peace and stability in South-East Asia.

Our world cannot have peace when conflicts are still raging in various parts of our planet. Today, the Middle East is again raising the deep concern of everyone. We share the position that tremendous efforts are needed to lead us to a durable and lasting peace for that region, which has suffered too much and too long. Such a peace can be achieved only on the basis of ensuring the safety of the nations living in this region, respecting the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish an independent Palestinian State, and, most immediately, the strict implementation of the United Nations resolutions and the principles of the Madrid Conference, as well as the accords that have been concluded.

In Asia and the Pacific in general and in South-East Asia in particular, where, fortunately, stability is on the rise, incremental efforts are being made to render this trend more durable. As a country bordering Cambodia, we give great attention to the situation in that neighbouring nation. Our position on the Cambodian question is clear to all: in conformity with our general foreign policy, we persevere in upholding the principle of full respect for the independence and sovereignty of nations and the principle that the affairs of a country must be decided by the people of that country itself, free from foreign interference. At the same time, from the bottom of our heart, we wish the Cambodian people peace and stability so that they can reconstruct a prosperous country in their homeland. We sincerely wish to tirelessly foster relations of friendship and cooperation with the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Bordering the South China Sea, which we call the Eastern Sea, Viet Nam has always considered that disputes there should be settled by negotiation on the basis of international law, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, with a view to achieving a sustainable and lasting solution. For the time being, it is necessary to preserve the status quo, exert self-restraint and abstain from acts that may further compound the situation and prejudice the stability of the region and the safety of international maritime navigation. At the same time, we should seek cooperation measures acceptable to the parties concerned. We share the satisfaction at the recent positive developments related to the situation in the Korean peninsula, and it is our wish that these developments will lead to a durable peace in this very sensitive part of our world.

Although peace is the most important condition for development, peace alone, without cooperation among States on the basis of equality and mutual respect and benefits, is not adequate. Today, in a world of ever-deepening interdependence, and under the impact of globalization and regionalization trends, the need for development cooperation is increasingly strong.

It is obvious that nations are facing unprecedented opportunities for expanding markets, engaging more partners and intensifying investment and technology transfers in order to attain higher growth. Besides this, there is a rather stark reality, especially for developing countries: the process of liberalization has made competition extremely acute, and in that competition the advantages do not go to countries which, due to certain circumstances, are still at a low level of economic development. It is therefore no surprise that the gap between the rich and poor countries is widening, causing great losses to developing nations.

That situation gives the international community two choices: either to let things go on, which will cause a more serious crisis, affecting the global economic and political situation; or to cooperate for shared development. In our humble opinion, the first scenario is not beneficial to anybody, while the latter brings about benefit for everybody.

With that perception, we are of the view that it is necessary to reverse the trend of decreasing official development assistance, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

With that perception, we look forward to stronger technology transfers, because outstanding and rapid scientific and technological progress is presenting a danger of developing countries being left further behind.

With that perception, we would like to emphasize the need to set up reasonable trade terms, taking into account the difficulties faced by developing countries, and to ensure that the developed countries broaden market access for commodities from the developing countries.

With that perception, we believe that it is high time to completely do away with the obsolete ways of thinking and acting of the past, namely, the imposition of inequitable terms of economic and trade relations, sanctions and embargoes, and so forth, which distort international relations, cause suffering to the people and seriously violate the minimum right of human beings — the right to a peaceful life.

Under the general circumstances of our world today, the need to reform the United Nations has become more and more imperative. We share many of the ideas that the Secretary-General has put forth. In our opinion, besides its contribution to the maintenance of peace, the promotion of equitable international cooperation — a top priority on the agenda of the United Nations — must mean more vigorous assistance to development. We offer our strong support for the ideas stated in the Secretary-General's report, "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950), which particularly underlined that the promotion of economic development and development cooperation was the primary mandate and function of the United Nations. It is our hope that countries, especially the developed ones, will enhance their contribution to the development programmes of the United Nations.

On this occasion, I wish to express our high appreciation to the institutions of the United Nations system for the assistance extended to Viet Nam, especially for our economic renovation to implement social programmes of poverty alleviation, health care and education development, and international integration. The commitment to further enhance the efficiency of the partnership between Viet Nam and the United Nations development system was made by the two partners at the conference to review 20 years of Viet Nam-United Nations cooperation, which took place recently in Hanoi.

With regard to the United Nations structure, our consistent view is that it should reflect the fundamental changes that have been taking place during the last half-century or more, the most notable highlight of which is that over 100 independent States have joined the United Nations. Its organizational structure and working procedures could be more democratized. The stature of developing countries needs to be strongly enhanced, including in the Security Council, and at the same time, the role of the General Assembly should be further strengthened. Along those lines, we share the view that it is necessary to increase the membership of the Security Council, both permanent and non-permanent categories, with a satisfactory number of seats given to developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and to ensure that every Member assumes similar responsibilities and rights. We believe that in order to work out a comprehensive programme for United Nations reform a Committee of the Whole should be established.

The National Assembly of Viet Nam has just held the first session of its tenth term in Hanoi to elect the highest dignitaries of our State and approve the list of new government members, thus realizing important continuity of generations of leadership. This National Assembly is of special significance, as it will lead our country into the twenty-first century on the road of all-round renovation to attain the goal of "Wealthy people, strong country, just and civilized society", through the process of national industrialization and modernization, in order to turn Viet Nam into a basically industrialized State by the year 2020.

In its foreign relations, Viet Nam will constantly pursue an open foreign policy of independence, diversification and the promotion of multilateral relations along the line of gradual regional and international integration, thus making worthy contributions to the cause of peace, national independence, democracy and social progress. In line with this policy, Viet Nam will continue to stand as an active Member of the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement. In line with this policy, Viet Nam is making constructive contributions to the intensification of cooperation within the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and is actively preparing the sixth ASEAN Summit to be held in Hanoi at the end of next year. In line with this policy, Viet Nam is competing with time to ensure the successful organization of the forthcoming seventh summit of French-speaking community in Hanoi. In line with this policy, Viet Nam is sparing no effort in making practical preparations to participate in the Asia-Pacific Economic

Cooperation Council and the World Trade Organization. Also in line with this policy, Viet Nam wishes to become a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council at the elections to be held at this session of the General Assembly. We are confident that this reasonable wish of ours will meet with the generous support of Member countries.

As we strive for the noble aspirations of peace and development on the eve of the new century, countries in the international community will continue to find in Viet Nam a sincere friend and constructive companion. On our part, we expect that United Nations activities will be ever more effective in enabling all countries to work for shared development in peace and partnership.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, His Excellency Mr. Abdus Samad Azad.

Mr. Azad (Bangladesh) (*spoke in Bengali; English text furnished by the delegation*): It affords me great pleasure and honour to convey to you, Mr. President, on behalf of my delegation, as well as on my own behalf, our heartiest congratulations on your unanimous election. It is a fitting tribute not only to your outstanding diplomatic skills and long involvement with the United Nations, but also to your country, with which we enjoy friendly relations.

To your predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, I should like to express our sincere appreciation for the remarkable job that he did. His was an extraordinarily proactive presidency. Indeed, he has given new stature to the office of President of the General Assembly.

This is the first regular session of the General Assembly for our Secretary-General Kofi Annan since his appointment to that high office. In the discharge of his very onerous responsibilities he brings to bear unmatched expertise with regard to the United Nations system. Indeed, he is the archetypical insider of that system. His appointment to the highest Secretariat position is recognition of his manifest competence. The priority that he has attached to the task of making the United Nations system more streamlined and attuned to present-day realities and requirements is indeed commendable.

While on the subject of reform, let me say that my delegation lends its full support to the initiative of the Secretary-General in submitting his reform proposal, which the Assembly will be examining later in the course of its business. There is no denying that the proposal is timely and that it has been put forward to make the United Nations more efficient and effective. We expect that the reform process will preserve and promote the centrality and sanctity of the principles and objectives of the United Nations Charter. My delegation also wants the process of reform to be carried out with the primary objective of strengthening the capacity of the Organization to address issues of development. Bangladesh would favour negotiating the reform package in informal plenary meetings with the full participation of all countries.

The United Nations Charter is of enduring validity. By definition, reform has to be a dynamic and periodic process as times, problems and priorities change. My delegation would fully support any endeavour to improve the administration and management of the United Nations. Member States have the right and even the duty to insist that optimal use be made of the resources that they have entrusted to the Organization for the promotion of the Charter objectives. Bangladesh assures its unstinted cooperation and support to eliminate duplication and overlap and to effect better coordination and prioritization. However, reform cannot be an acceptable surrogate for political will, and those two aspects must be mutually supportive and reinforcing.

In the context of the reform exercise, Bangladesh would like to stress that the exclusively international character of the responsibilities of the Secretary-General and his staff should in no way be compromised. According to Article 101 of the Charter, the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity should be the basic determinants in making appointments to the Secretariat, with due regard to geographical distribution. We therefore welcome the Secretary General's proposal to submit a code of conduct for international civil servants.

No endeavour at United Nations reform will be successful without the necessary financial resources. The continuation of the current financial crisis of the United Nations has seriously impaired the functioning of the Organization. For a financially sick United Nations, the much needed shot in the arm can come only from the full and unconditional payment of outstanding contributions by those Member States that have not yet done so.

The cold-war era of adversarial alliances, power blocs and ideological divides is happily a thing of the past. However, another war, one in which the United

Nations will have to be in the vanguard, remains to be fought and won before a meaningful peace and international security can be achieved. That is the war against poverty, ignorance and prejudice.

Peace does not simply happen or come about fortuitously. It must be sedulously built and nurtured and underpinned by a host of interrelated actions that are inextricably linked to development and human security. A culture of peace is essential to make it sustainable and all embracing. Over the years, the concept of security has evolved, as has the concept of development. The United Nations can be, as the President of the General Assembly put it last year, the main development catalyst, one that can strongly influence coordination at the macro level with other bodies that have more access to resources but that are less democratically set up.

We have been discussing for the past few years the question of Security Council expansion and reform. There is a clear logic and rationale for an expansion of the overall size of the Council to make it more representative in character. On this aspect of the question a general consensus seems to have emerged, although there exist differences as to the exact size of any new Council. Where a convergence of view — let alone consensus — continues to elude us is on the question of the expansion of the number of permanent seats. Bangladesh's concern, which we have already articulated, is that, in any enlargement exercise, the concerns of the smaller and more vulnerable States that have the most vital stake in an effective and dynamic United Nations should not be lost sight of.

In the decade of the 1990s we have had a series of high-profile global conferences. These mega-conferences have addressed some of the major challenges that are confronting us today and, with the United Nations playing a central role, reached important political consensus. Those gatherings underscored in particular the primacy of human development in achieving sustained and sustainable development.

The Agenda for Development adopted in June this year is in a sense the culmination of this series, representing a synthesis of the plans and programmes of action that had been adopted. The Agenda is the result of tortuous and painstaking negotiations carried out over a period of four years. It is a matter of gratification to have achieved a development consensus that was so badly needed and clearly warranted. It is, of course, most vital that, along with the Agenda for Development, follow-up and implementation should match the outcome of these conferences.

Bangladesh believes that without the full involvement of civil society this process will remain incomplete. Recognizing the key role of civil society in promoting global partnership, we welcome the Secretary-General's proposal for a people's millennium Assembly in the year 2000.

It is now widely accepted that free enterprise, the market economy, international trade and competition, as well as broad-based public participation in economic expansion, are the keys to economic growth and human development. To this mix must be added the components of democracy, good governance and the rule of law. This, however, in no way diminishes, particularly in the case of the least developed countries, the imperative of a supportive external environment. Improved access to world markets, greater inflow of foreign private investment, transfer of technology and managerial know-how and larger external assistance all have very important roles to play in ensuring development. Economic liberalization should invariably be combined, in our view, with adequate social safety nets to safeguard the most vulnerable segments of society.

It is a matter of some concern to us that global official development assistance flows continue to slump. We sincerely hope, though, that this trend will be reversed. The development of the South is not only an investment in peace and security, but would clearly also rebound to the advantage of the countries of the North in the long and not so long run, since this would mean bigger markets for their exports, with all their concomitant benefits. Development has been most aptly described as a partnership.

The plight of the least developed countries, in particular, calls for very careful consideration and has in the past merited a special place and focus in the international agenda. Two major international conferences on the least developed countries have been held in the 1980s and 1990s and important decisions and programmes of action adopted. The implementation of these, however, has been disappointing. We hope that the third United Nations Conference on the least developed countries can be held in the year 2000 to chart the course of global support for these weakest members at the start of next millennium.

We would urge special consideration and concessions for the least developed countries in order to enable them to meet World Trade Organization deadlines. Indeed, if the situation so warrants, deadlines may even be made flexible for that group of countries. We would also urge that, at the forthcoming high-level meeting in Geneva next month, all major issues of concern to the least developed countries, including duty-free access of their products to foreign markets, be given most favourable consideration.

The end of cold war perhaps naturally raised our hopes for a new and exciting world order in which nations would share the responsibility for freedom and justice and the strong would respect the rights of the weak — a world of open borders, open trade and open minds. Such a vision can and should surely be our goal and inspiration. To achieve it, in particular at the regional level, cooperation in carefully identified core areas of activity, including trade and investment, is a valuable tool of development.

In our own region, through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), we are striving to accelerate progress in core areas of cooperation, such as poverty eradication, expansion of regional trade and investment. We have also, within the ambit of SAARC, launched a "growth quadrangle" involving four member States — Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan — in order to explore areas of joint economic activity and take advantage of the factor of contiguity. Moreover, outside of SAARC, Bangladesh has entered the Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIST-EC) in order to boost cooperation in the economic and commercial fields among its four member countries. A consensus decision has now been taken to allow Myanmar to join this subregional group as a full member.

Last year, while addressing the General Assembly, I referred to the negotiations that were being held with India on sharing the waters of the Ganges River. This had proved to be an intractable problem for over two decades and it is a matter of great satisfaction to us all that, in December last year, we signed a 30-year treaty at the highest political level with India on sharing arrangements. The signing of this treaty, within months of the present Government's assumption of office, demonstrated that, given goodwill and political will, the most difficult problems can be resolved.

At the national level, we are affording every facility and cooperation to our private sector and providing liberal incentives to foreign entrepreneurs to invest in our country. The Government's role will be to oversee and to provide safety nets where necessary. The Government is making every effort to combat the blighting scourges of widespread poverty and deprivation, so that we may realize the dream — to which the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, dedicated his entire political career and life — of a country free, progressive and prosperous, at peace with the world and with itself.

Ours has also been a pioneering role in the field of microcredit. Initiated by the Grameen Bank and considered a most innovative approach to the eradication of poverty and empowerment of women, it has been recognized and emulated in a good number of developing and developed countries. The Microcredit Summit held in Washington earlier this year was a success: a target was set there to free 100 million families from the stranglehold of poverty by the year 2005. At the United Nations, the "Friends of Microcredit" ambassadors have taken the initiative to follow up the implementation process throughout the United Nations system.

In Bangladesh, we have accorded priority to and placed special emphasis on social sector development in such areas as health care, education, family planning, women in development and the preservation and promotion of human rights. The initiatives and efforts of our Prime Minister in this regard have been widely appreciated. I would particularly mention here that the Government, under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the illustrious daughter of the Father of the Nation, has announced the decision to set up a National Human Rights Commission. Our Parliament is expected to pass the required legislative mandate for this Commission next year. We are also working towards the establishment of *grameen*, or rural, courts, which will take justice to the people at the grass-roots level. This concept of participatory justice is still a novel one. Its purpose is to ensure speedy, effective and inexpensive justice to the humblest of citizens.

While on the subject of human rights, I should like to express our pleasure that an individual of the eminence and distinction of Mrs. Mary Robinson has been appointed United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We would like to assure her of the wholehearted cooperation of our Government. We look forward to working with her in close concert in the promotion of human rights, a goal that all of us share and cherish, with special focus on the right to development and the rights of women and children.

The Constitution of Bangladesh specifically provides for our international relations to be based, *inter alia*, on the principles of the United Nations Charter. It is thus for us a matter of singular pride and gratification that Bangladesh should be playing such an active role in United Nations peacekeeping operations. This is a role that we consider to be a solemn duty and an earnest of our commitment to the United Nations and the principles and purposes of the Charter.

We still have a long way to go in the area of disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament. The entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention is a major step forward.

It is a truism that our world is becoming increasingly interdependent. The uncomfortable fact remains, though, that it is still a far more dangerous place than that it should be. West Asia, the Palestinian issue, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan and the Great Lakes region all present problems that impinge on international peace and security. The United Nations, of course, is playing a pivotal role in seeking peaceful and equitable resolutions of these problems.

We sincerely hope that the peace process in the Middle East will move forward and that the years of negotiations, investment and effort will bear fruit. Our views on this particular issue are well known. Relevant Security Council resolutions exist, as do agreements negotiated outside the ambit of the United Nations, on the basis of which a meaningful peace can be achieved in the Middle East and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to an independent homeland, restored.

As we approach the next century, it will have to be our collective endeavour to strengthen and to reinforce institutions at the global level that can effectively address the problems of the post-cold-war world. The United Nations in essence represents the entire human race in microcosm, with its wisdom and follies, its successes and shortcomings. It is an experiment, as was once said, in living together as a single human family. To be sure, the United Nations is an Organization of Governments — the apex of intergovernmental organs. And yet it is also true that its foundations rest on the yearnings of the peoples of the world for a lasting peace.

The opening words of the Charter read:

> "We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war".

The peoples and nations of the world will have to work in concert if stability, prosperity and a meaningful peace are to be achieved on a global scale. Bangladesh, of course, will be at the forefront of this endeavour.

Address by Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, His Excellency Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Kabbah: It is indeed an honour once again to address the General Assembly.

On behalf of the people of Sierra Leone, and on my own behalf, I congratulate you, Sir, on your election to preside over the work of this session, which you rightly described as one that can mark the beginning of a new era in United Nations history. Ukraine, a founding Member of our Organization, is well known for its decisive stand on unilateral nuclear disarmament. This in itself is a major contribution to the promotion of international peace and security. As an experienced diplomat and former senior member of the Secretariat, you are fully equipped to steer this session to a successful conclusion.

I wish also to pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, for the firm and skilful manner in which he led the Assembly in dealing with the issues of the fifty-first session.

We commend the Secretary-General for the bold effort he has made so far in mapping out the tracks of his quiet revolution, a reform of the Secretariat. This is perhaps the first time in the history of the Organization

that we have in the same session a President of the General Assembly and a Secretary-General both of whom were staff members of the United Nations Secretariat. I would like to convey through the Secretary-General our appreciation to the entire staff of the United Nations system, who have been and continue to be pillars supporting the structures of peace and economic and social well-being which our Organization is building in various parts of the world.

When I addressed this body last year, I spoke at length about my Government's efforts to reach a peace agreement with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the settlement of people displaced by the conflict and our efforts at national reconciliation. I also spoke of our hopes: our hopes for the consolidation of our new democracy, for the revival of our economy and for the regeneration of communities scarred by years of war. These were no starry-eyed pronouncements. We were too well aware of the challenges which the achievement of these objectives entailed, but we were tackling them in a spirit of realism within the framework of a united national effort and, above all, in confident hope.

In the economic sphere, for example, the response was promising. My Government was credited within a year with the introduction of a social security scheme and a minimum wage act; accountability and transparency in public spending; trade liberalization and public enterprise reform, including privatization; reduction of the rate of inflation from 65 per cent to 6 per cent; achievement of a 5 per cent economic growth rate, which had been minus 10 per cent a year earlier; and plans for an investment code. These are some of the signposts of confidence which national and international investors saw when they concluded that Sierra Leone was well on its way to economic recovery. Prospects for that recovery were at their highest in more than two decades.

Today I appear before you with a heavy heart. As I speak, a great tragedy is unfolding in my country. On 25 May 1997, a combination of elements of the Sierra Leone army and the Revolutionary United Front violently overthrew my democratically elected Government and unleashed on the country a reign of terror unprecedented in its scope and ferocity. Overnight, Sierra Leone was transformed into a gulag of horrors: the killing of defenceless, innocent civilians, looting, confiscation of property and rape. These atrocities continue. The people of Sierra Leone have been ushered into a long night of darkness. For the first time in our history, the survival of our national society as a morally and socially cohesive whole has been put into question.

It is against the background of these dramatically changed conditions in my country that I appear before you today, to make an appeal — a desperate appeal — for help from the international community to save a nation and a people. My presence on this podium symbolizes the people of Sierra Leone stretching out their hands to the United Nations, asking it to pull them back from the brink of catastrophe.

The people of Sierra Leone are united in a common fear, the fear that unless something is done, and done now, the barbarism and adventurism of the military junta will push the country over the brink. Their hope is that the international community will not allow the military junta to convert their country into one vast killing field. If the prevailing situation is allowed to drift much longer, because of a failure of political will, or for any other reason, then the hopes of a peace-loving nation for a life worthy of normal human beings will have been betrayed. I am more than convinced that this cannot be what the United Nations would like to see happen in Sierra Leone. My belief in the United Nations, as the custodian of world peace and security, and as the ultimate defence of the weak and the defenceless, remains as strong as ever. It is on the strength of this conviction, which has been a part of all my adult life, that I bring the case of Sierra Leone to the attention of the Assembly.

Only the speedy restoration of the democratically elected Government of Sierra Leone can provide a lasting solution to the crisis and enable the country to return to normalcy and to resume its place as a responsible member of the community of nations. This is no self-serving statement. To insist on the restoration of my Government is no more than to insist that the Government which the people of Sierra Leone freely and openly elected in the most closely invigilated election in the post-independence history of the country be restored to them. Indeed, when the Summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) held in Harare considered the matter it resolved strongly and unequivocally to condemn the *coup d'état* and called for the immediate restoration of constitutional order in Sierra Leone.

My Government emerged as a result of a transition process under the their military regime of the National Provisional Ruling Council. It was that regime which appointed the Interim National Electoral Commission as the management body responsible for the conduct of both the parliamentary and presidential elections. At the request of the Interior National Electoral Commission, the Commonwealth secretariat in London provided three

experts, including a legal draftsman, to help with the preparations for the elections. None of these people had been to Sierra Leone before and they knew nobody in the country. The point of their attachment to the Interior National Electoral Commission was to bring to bear on the work of the Commission the highest international electoral practices. The European Union also provided a voter education expert from Britain, while the United Nations supplied a logistical expert.

In other words, at the heart of the election management body, the international community had a presence to ensure the highest standard of probity and transparency in the conduct of the elections.

In January 1996, in the middle of the preparations for the elections, Brigadier Maada Bio forced Captain Valentine Strasser out of office as Chairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council and immediately launched a campaign to postpone the elections. The banner of that campaign was "Peace before Elections". A national consultative conference comprising representatives of political parties, the army, the police, trade unions, women's organizations, the churches and mosques and other organizations of civil society was convened in February 1996 to pronounce on the matter. I should add that in attendance were also representatives of the international community. The overwhelming majority of the delegates to the conference supported the holding of elections. Incidentally, the Revolutionary United Front was invited to participate in the democratic process. Clearly illustrating its attitude towards legitimate democratic principles and procedures, the Front categorically refused to honour the invitation.

And so the elections were held on 26 and 27 February 1996. There were observers from the Commonwealth, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African-American Institute, the African-American Labor Center, the Commonwealth Trade Union Council and the World Council of Churches, all coordinated by no less a body than the United Nations itself. At the close of polling, and long before the official declaration of the results, the international observers made a joint statement on 29 February 1996, in which they said that, despite setbacks, they had witnessed a remarkably peaceful, orderly and transparent conduct of the vote, which led them to conclude

> "that the results will genuinely reflect the will of the people of Sierra Leone and usher in an era of democracy".

Having failed to prevent the holding of the elections through political manoeuvring, the anti-democratic forces within the army and their Revolutionary United Front allies launched a campaign of terror and intimidation in those parts of the countryside where the rebels had a presence to scare away people from voting. Many innocent men and women had their hands cut off. Some were branded with hot irons and many more were mutilated in ways that I cannot describe in public. But no intimidation could overcome the determination of the people to put an end to military rule and all its associated abuses.

The elections which brought my Government into office were more than an electoral exercise to replace one Government with another. They were no less than an opportunity — indeed, a historic opportunity — for the people of Sierra Leone to put an end to nearly 30 years of undemocratic rule, the last four of which were an outright military dictatorship.

In retrospect, the victories of the people, first against the political sleight of hand to stop the elections, and then against the campaign of terror and intimidation to scare away the voters from the polling booths, seem to have left the reactionary forces in our country with only one remaining avenue to their objective, the unconstitutional overthrow of any civil Government, and that was precisely what happened on 25 May.

The people of Sierra Leone have responded to the coup in a manner unique in the history of Africa. Thousands of citizens, some out of fear for their lives and other human rights violations, simply abandoned their homes and their country, moved into neighbouring countries, declaring they would rather live as refugees outside Sierra Leone than stay under the rule of the illegal junta. Those who stayed behind have refused to go to work and have in various ways refused to cooperate with the junta. This is the manifestation of the determination of Sierra Leoneans never to surrender their hard-won democracy.

The struggle under way in my country is between the unarmed millions defending the cause of democracy and the armed reactionary clique of mutinous soldiers and their Revolutionary United Front cohorts. In embarking on that perilous struggle, the people of Sierra Leone were never in doubt as to where the sheer military advantage lay. What continues to sustain the determined resistance of the people and to fortify their courage is the belief, and the expectation, that the international community

cannot, and will not, let them down — indeed, the belief that, whatever hardship they are facing at the moment, right will ultimately triumph over might.

No one who has seen the reign of terror unleashed by the regime on the defenceless citizenry or witnessed the daily looting, rape and other brutalities which have now become a way of life in Sierra Leone can mistake this for peace. There is no peace in Sierra Leone. What is happening is that the horrors which the RUF inflicted on the rural communities — the killings, the amputation of limbs, the looting, the arbitrary and illegal seizure of private property of all kinds and many other crimes — have now been generalized to encompass the urban centres as well. To further compound their assault on innocent civilians, the illegal junta has finally resorted to the laying of anti-personnel landmines throughout the country, and within the capital city itself. I need not spell out what a horrific act this represents as far as innocent men, women and children are concerned as they begin to fall victim to these hidden devices.

This was precisely what my Government set out to avert. In my inaugural statement as President, I made the pursuit of peace and the end of the rebel war my most urgent priority. Within a matter of days of assuming office, I signed a communiqué at Yamoussoukro, in Côte d'Ivoire, with the leader of the RUF, Corporal Foday Sankoh, in which we effectively agreed upon a permanent ceasefire. That agreement opened the way for substantive negotiations between the Government and the RUF, culminating in the Abidjan peace accord of 30 November 1996.

What my Government did not know was that the RUF was negotiating in bad faith. We took the RUF at its word and assumed that its professed commitment to peace was genuine. The negotiations were protracted because the RUF was adamant on certain issues. We conceded on those particular issues with the hope that the RUF would honour the resulting accord. This is, of course, not to suggest that there were no doubters in our ranks who harboured misgivings about the sincerity of the RUF. We had our share of these doubting Thomases, but on the basis of our peoples yearning for peace, we elected to be guided more by our hopes and less by our fears.

After peace, national reconciliation was another central plank of my Government's policy. The pursuit of that policy began with the very configuration of my administration. My party had a substantial majority in Parliament, and I myself had won the presidential elections with a convincing majority. On the basis of the outcome of the elections, therefore, I was under no obligation to include in my Government people from other parties. But I took a wider view of the matter and decided that if the cause of national reconciliation was to be advanced it would be desirable to have a broad-based Government. Accordingly, I appointed the leader of one of the minority parties to be my Minister of Finance, making him, effectively, the third most senior member of the Government. Other ministerial and senior positions were filled by people drawn from other political parties. What emerged as a result was a broad-based Government of national unity in all but name.

The policy of national reconciliation was taken further. The previous military regime, the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) had confiscated the properties of many senior Sierra Leoneans not on the basis of law or due process, but on ad hoc commissions of inquiry whose findings were not published and were subject to no appeal. No one pretended that justice had been done by the work of those commissions of inquiry. Yet, on the basis of their findings, not only had many people lost their properties, some of them had also been disqualified from holding public office. If Sierra Leone's new democracy was to mean anything, this was a state of affairs which could not be allowed to continue. I appointed a National Commission for Reconciliation and applied to the Commonwealth secretariat for a senior Commonwealth judge to review the findings of the commission of inquiry and to put right what had been put wrong. I wanted a judge of suitable seniority and distinction whose verdict would command respect. The Commonwealth Secretary-General secured for me the services of judge Ulric Cross of Trinidad and Tobago. He was due to return to Sierra Leone to resume his chairmanship of the National Commission for Reconciliation when the coup took place.

Following the earlier coup of April 1992, which had installed the NPRC military regime in power, many Sierra Leoneans went into exile. They, too, had to be enabled to come home in security and in dignity. Former President Joseph Saidu Momoh had been living in exile in Guinea since the coup of April 1992. My Government brought him home and resettled him in a manner befitting a man who had been our Head of State.

I have gone into this background in detail to show what my Government did to end the war that had been raging for the best part of five years, to achieve national reconciliation and to usher in lasting peace. All this and much else will be erased if the regime is allowed to

remain in power. The burning question before the world community, therefore, is how best to bring a swift end to the ruinous regime of the military and to enable Sierra Leone to rejoin the mainstream of human society.

Some people with the best of intentions but with little knowledge of the situation have called for negotiations to end the tragedy unfolding in Sierra Leone.I have been involved in negotiations of one kind or another throughout my career. In fact, in a sense negotiating is second nature to me. Accordingly, I have no problems with the principle of negotiation. But it would be utterly disingenuous of me not to state the serious reservations I hold about negotiating with the junta.

In the first place, the junta is an unstable coalition. On the surface it presents itself as a government in which every member shares collective responsibility for decisions jointly taken. In reality it is nothing of the kind. There is nothing collective about the junta except the determination of its constituent parts to hang on to power. For now the RUF may be allied with some elements of the army, but there is no pretence that they are motivated by the same long-term objectives. The RUF is not the army, and it is certainly not under the command of the mutinous faction of the Army. The RUF has a separate and independent command structure, and it takes its instructions from its own high command. Therefore, based on our experience, in any putative negotiations with the RUF it can be expected to come to the table with its own set of demands. The decision of one part of the unstable coalition will not, by any stretch of the imagination, bind the other. Indeed, precisely because they have separate and quite possibly conflicting objectives there is hardly any prospect of negotiating with anything like a unified position.

In the second place, the RUF is undoubtedly the faction with the upper hand within the junta. The RUF's principal objective all along has been to take and keep power by all means, including terror and murder. In its present configuration, the RUF has no coherent programme to speak of. Rather than yield power peacefully, the RUF has threatened to launch a scorched-earth campaign to reduce the country to ashes. Its position is that if it cannot rule Sierra Leone, nobody else should.

And if none of these points is convincing, we have only to look at the way in which the junta has handled the negotiations with the Committee of four Foreign Ministers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The three-point ECOWAS formula for the resolution of the Sierra Leone crisis entailed, in order,

> "the early reinstatement of the legitimate Government of President Tejan Kabbah, the return of peace and security and the resolution of the issues of refugees and displaced persons".

This was the basis on which the regime entered into negotiations with the ECOWAS Committee of four. The third meeting between the Committee and representatives of the regime in Abidjan took place on 30 July 1997. It was expected to be a breakthrough meeting. However, while it was in progress, the leader of the junta made a radio and television broadcast in which he stated clearly that his regime was determined to remain in power for a minimum of four years. His statement was intended to wreck the talks, and that was exactly what it did. He has not retracted his determination to stay in power for four years.

If, in spite of the illegal junta's record of bad faith, the international community insists that we must take the path of negotiations, then I suggest that such negotiations should be held between the junta and the Committee of ECOWAS Foreign Ministers, whose membership has now been increased to five. And for those negotiations to be meaningful, they must proceed on the basis of clear understandings. In the first place, if the negotiations are resumed, the three-point ECOWAS negotiating agenda must remain the agenda of such negotiations. Then they must be time-bound. If they are open-ended, the regime can be expected to filibuster and to spin them out indefinitely in the hope that it will achieve a creeping de facto recognition by the international community.

Then, the junta's delegation must always be led by the junta leader himself. The Committee of five should insist on no less, because if the regime's delegation is led by anyone else, the scope for subsequent repudiation and double-dealing will become infinite. Finally, to ensure that the regime treats the negotiations with the seriousness they deserve, existing international pressures and measures must not only be maintained but further strengthened. In that way the genuineness of the regime's declared intention to negotiate will be tested.

When all this is done and an agreement is reached, we will still have to face the task of achieving genuine and total national reconciliation. What Sierra Leone needs today more than anything else is peace and reconciliation. I have never lost sight of this need, and it is the one objective which has influenced every step that I have taken since assuming office in March 1996. The events of 25 May have only further deepened those divisions

within our society which my policies had begun to heal. As a result, the adoption of a more vigorous policy of national reconciliation has become an absolute necessity.

It would not be exaggerating the case to say that the brand of political persuasion practised by the military-RUF coalition borders on systematic genocide. Since 25 May 1997, whole villages, entire communities and targeted families have been wholly or partially decimated in the eastern, northern and southern provinces of Sierra Leone, in Moyamba, Bonthe, Sanda, Bumpe, Kumrabai, Foredugu — the list is endless.

That is why many Sierra Leoneans strongly believe that a war crimes tribunal should be appointed to try all those who had a hand in the making of our tragedy. I understand the feelings behind this demand, but I reject it. I reject it because it will add to our already grave problems and postpone lasting national reconciliation.

Throughout this address I have tried to draw a distinction between elements of the army in complicity with the head of the junta and the bulk of the army, who are basically decent men and women and loyal to the best traditions of the Sierra Leone army. Even so, I do not believe that any worthwhile national purpose will be served by a policy of reprisals against the misguided elements of the army and others in the junta's camp.

We seek no more from the United Nations than the assurance of 6 August 1997 contained in the statement made by the President of the Security Council:

> "The Security Council will, in the absence of a satisfactory response from the military junta, be ready to take appropriate measures with the objective of restoring the democratically elected Government of President Kabbah." *(S/PRST/1997/42, p. 1)*

At the same time, we are asking the Security Council to assist ECOWAS and the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in giving practical effect to that objective. By doing so, the Council will not only be saving the lives of the people of Sierra Leone, but will also be averting an escalation of the crisis which now threatens peace and security in our subregion. And here I should like to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of my Government and the people of Sierra Leone, our sincere appreciation to the Heads of State and the Committee of Foreign Ministers of ECOWAS for their efforts over the past four months in pursuit of their objective, which the Security Council supports.

Once the objective of restoring the democratically elected Government is achieved, my Government will, in the same spirit of reconciliation which had guided its policies since the 1996 elections, consider, in an appropriate forum, the serious question of security and full implementation of the Abidjan Peace Agreement. Security is paramount. Without security, no meaningful humanitarian assistance can reach the people of Sierra Leone.

Notwithstanding the acts of bad faith initiated by the RUF to derail the peace process and despite the dangerous coalition which had emerged since the 25 May coup, my Government, the legal Government of Sierra Leone, is committed to the Agreement. We are also committed to the Secretary-General's plan and recommendations, submitted to the Security Council last January, for the establishment and maintenance of a peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone in connection with the implementation of the Abidjan Peace Agreement.

We are ready to reactivate my Government's agenda for reconciliation, resettlement of refugees and displaced persons, and rehabilitation and reconstruction which the military-RUF junta so ruthlessly disrupted almost five months ago. We owe it to our people to continue the transformation of our economy from emergency relief programmes to realistic projects for medium- and long-term self-sufficiency. Of course, we know that this is not going to be easy. However, we are confident that the immediate and unconditional restoration of my Government, the Government elected by the people, constitutes the first step towards that transformation.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone for the statement he has just made.

Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Hungary, His Excellency Mr. László Kovács.

Mr. Kovács (Hungary): I am very pleased to see the Foreign Minister of neighbouring Ukraine assume the

prestigious post of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. In fulfilling your challenging tasks you may rest assured of the support and cooperation of the delegation of Hungary.

Our tribute and thanks are also due to your predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, who served us with distinction and innovative spirit.

In the post-cold-war era, international organizations are undergoing a profound adaptation process. Here, in the United Nations, we are only at the beginning of a bumpy road. Whether the United Nations can find its place in the new international political environment of the twenty-first century depends on our foresight, realism and determination. If our decisions are underpinned by a strongly shared joint commitment to tackle the global agenda, we can make the United Nations relevant for the next millennium.

The reform proposals presented by Secretary-General Kofi Annan are guided by the urgency of the task, sober realism and healthy idealism as well as personal commitment to change. We welcome the intention of the Secretary-General to proceed to the early implementation of concrete organizational measures within his own areas of competence.

The package of proposals which require action by the Member States themselves truly captures those areas of United Nations activities where agreements are necessary at this stage. The suggestions to ensure the desired coherence of United Nations efforts in development cooperation, to bolster its institutional capacity to combat international crime, drug-trafficking and terrorism, or to integrate human rights concerns into all principal United Nations activities and programmes deserve our full support and need swift and concrete action. Let me add the voice of my delegation to all those who have called for approval at this session of the package as a whole, which will have to be followed by practical steps in order to translate it into meaningful action.

In its foreign policy Hungary continues to serve international peace and stability, with special regard to its own region. The tragic events in former Yugoslavia, the crises and convulsions on the territory of the former Soviet Union and elsewhere, the emergence of aggressive nationalism as well as populism in Central and Eastern Europe, as an appealing "remedy" for political problems, economic difficulties and social tensions, are vivid reminders of the critical, sometimes lethal, nature of these challenges. They underscore how important it is that the international community act with appropriate means and in a timely manner.

Mr. Boyd (Panama), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Hungary supports the efforts of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and of other multilateral regional organizations to help prevent new conflicts, to initiate, where needed, peacekeeping and peace-building activities, to solidify the rule of law and to promote cooperation in the OSCE area. My country is seeking to consolidate genuine good-neighbourly relations with all the countries of its region, especially with countries bordering it, and to launch regional initiatives and enhance regional cooperation to better respond to the new challenges threatening regional stability. It is in this spirit that we have been active in the creation of, and have sought to expand, various forms of regional cooperation, such as the Central European Initiative, the Central European Free Trade Agreement and the South-East European Cooperative Initiative, involving a large number of countries in the region, or have moved ahead with trilateral, more tailor-made, cooperative schemes with a number of our immediate neighbours. Regional and cross-border cooperation is a valuable asset for regional stability and security, and has to be utilized to its full potential.

As we look forward, from the invitation we received from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Summit in Madrid to the winding up of the accession talks with the Alliance, and in the expectation of the commencement of negotiations on our entry into the European Union next January, we wish to develop further such regional activities of dialogue and wide-ranging cooperation in order to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines and to assist all the countries of the region in their drive to join the mainstream European developments. We are also confident that Hungary, through the structures of Euro-Atlantic integration, will become an even more active partner and supporter of the United Nations.

The post-cold-war era has brought to the forefront urgent questions. These include issues related to the future operation of the United Nations conflict-management capacity. The debate unfolding on these problems has political, legal and, quite often, emotional dimensions as well. We welcome the proposals of the Secretary-General geared towards enhancing the rapid reaction capabilities of the United Nations.

It is in this context that in recent years Hungary has increased its participation in United Nations mandated peacekeeping operations in a variety of ways, including both infrastructural and logistical support and the deployment of military and police personnel, an example of which is the Hungarian contribution to the Implementation Force and the Stabilization Force and the considerable increase in the number of Hungarian peacekeepers serving in the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus. We are pleased that the performance and professional skill of my compatriots engaged in various such operations all across the globe are considered positively.

The issue of the functioning and the size of the Security Council has been extensively dealt with at several United Nations forums. Legitimacy and efficiency are both important premises for any pattern of Security Council reform. The general view is that, once the Security Council is enlarged, its size and composition should be not an impediment, but, rather, an asset for effective decision-making and action, enjoying the widest possible support and cooperation of the membership at large. Agreement on Security Council enlargement is a fundamental pillar of the United Nations reform process. We have to make sure that with a future Security Council comprising Germany, Japan and countries each from Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean as permanent members, and also additional non-permanent members, we preserve and enhance the purpose-oriented character of this important body.

The financial reform of our Organization is an indispensable prerequisite to ensure its viability and relevance. Payment of assessed contributions is an obligation under the United Nations Charter. Hungary has made serious efforts to meet all its outstanding financial assessments, and now we belong to the yet small, but, hopefully, growing group of Member States which pay all their contributions to the regular as well as peacekeeping budgets in full and without conditions.

To solve the financial crisis, we must find a way that is acceptable to Member States and is good for the Organization. The delegation of Hungary stands ready to join in further constructive efforts along the lines of the proposal presented by the European Union with a view to arriving at a comprehensive compromise solution.

After the demise of the political structures of the cold war, international protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms can no longer be relegated to some distant corner of United Nations activities. As a legitimate concern of the international community, human rights issues should be given their due weight in all United Nations activities, in a well coordinated manner. This must be reflected in the provision of adequate funding.

Today, human rights are violated on a massive scale worldwide, and we all must stand up in their defence and hold violators accountable wherever abuses occur. We are aware that there exist regional, cultural and other specificities in the field of human rights. We believe, however, that these should not stand in the way of consistency in promoting universal respect for human rights and should not allow complacency to surface in attitudes towards human rights violations.

We are pleased with the Secretary-General's excellent choice of Mrs. Mary Robinson to serve as the next High Commissioner for Human Rights. We will lend her assistance to make the United Nations more effective in responding to human rights challenges, including those stemming from ethnic discrimination. As recent developments have shown, these represent a threat to regional and international stability and security.

Development and environment are questions of the utmost importance for the future, and even the survival, of humankind. United Nations activities in this sphere should lead to the elaboration of a comprehensive programme for sustainable development acceptable to all nations. We wish to voice our concern about the insufficient progress achieved in this domain. We lend our full support to efforts aimed at seeking solutions to the burning questions of underdevelopment and at stopping the processes of degradation of the ecological habitat of our planet.

Armed conflicts continue to take their toll, sometimes decades after the cessation of hostilities, due to the presence of anti-personnel landmines. The plight of tens of thousands of innocent victims has been a growing source of international concern in no small part as a result of effective advocacy by human rights groups and humanitarian organizations. Hungary stands for the total ban of these devices. My Government has supported the Ottawa process from its very inception; it welcomes the success of the Diplomatic Conference held on this issue at Oslo and intends to become one of the first signatories of the new Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. This is an important

milestone in the development of international humanitarian law and in the endeavour to put an end to the immense human suffering caused by the proliferation and indiscriminate use of these weapons. At the same time, in our view, the remarkable achievements of the Oslo Conference do not diminish the role that other forums, including the Conference on Disarmament, can play in promoting the objectives of the new Convention.

The horrible atrocities and genocidal acts committed during recent conflicts have speeded up negotiations on establishing international criminal jurisdiction on war crimes and crimes against humanity. By establishing the *ad hoc* tribunals on former Yugoslavia and on Rwanda, the international community reaffirmed an important principle: all those having committed war crimes or crimes against humanity are to be held personally responsible and accountable. It is our legitimate expectation that all persons indicted by the tribunals will be brought to justice and moreover that failing to cooperate fully with the tribunals will not remain without consequences.

The experience gained from the functioning of these two *ad hoc* tribunals has paved the way for the wider acceptance of the idea of an international criminal court, thus creating a firm legal basis at the universal level for the establishment of individual criminal responsibility with regard to war crimes and crimes against humanity. We are committed to pursuing vigorously the negotiations at this session to enable the finalization of the statute of the court at the diplomatic conference to be held next year.

At this session, we have to focus our efforts on preparing the ground for practical steps to make the United Nations a viable and dynamic body. We must maintain the momentum for change if we want to ensure a decent future for the human experiment.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call next on His Excellency Mr. Bizima Karaha, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Karaha (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*interpretation from French*): I wish from this rostrum to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko on his unanimous election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. I am certain that the successful conduct of the work of this session will justify the confidence we all have in his outstanding qualities as a statesman.

I wish also to pay tribute to his predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail, whose ability and intelligence won the high regard of us all.

Let me pay tribute also to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his dedication to the cause of international peace and security and for his in-depth knowledge of the issues on which the future of world peace depends.

I want to emphasize my country's commitment to the Charter ideals of peace, security, democracy, human rights and development. It is for the triumph of those ideals that we have struggled. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is among the few countries that from time immemorial, owing to its geostrategic placement and its vast human and natural resources, has borne the burden of a sombre history of suffering and outrageous violations of human rights and the rights of peoples.

In 1885, when Africa was being colonized, my country was set up as a State that was the personal property of the King of the Belgians; it endured violence and blatant violations of human rights connected *inter alia* with the exploitation of red rubber and other kinds of forced labour. It became a Belgian colony in 1908, and was later to experience a decolonization process that was not merely botched, but was disastrous because my country became part of the global stakes in the East-West strategic rivalry.

After my country acceded to independence in June 1960, at the height of the cold war, the symbol of our sovereignty, Prime Minister Patrice Emergy Lumumba, was martyred to that sovereignty.

Under the complaisant eyes of the international community, a bloody and reactionary dictatorship was formed in the very heart of Africa, in the strategic interests of the dominating West, with the mission of destabilizing neighbouring countries. Thirty years later, thanks to the political changes that took place in the world in 1989, the international community saw regretfully the disastrous results of the support it had given to a regime that was a State in name only.

The disasters caused by these years of bloody and ignoble dictatorship are so well known that there is no need to recount them. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and all the bodies of the United Nations system have studies, evaluations and gripping and moving

testimony of what the Mobutu regime represented at the end of the twentieth century.

The opening of this fifty-second session of the General Assembly coincides happily with the emergence in Africa of a new generation of leaders who are totally dedicated to the cause of African renaissance and who are inspired by the decisive will to take in hand the destiny of the continent and to play their role in the community of nations.

Among these individuals is Mr. Laurent-Désiré Kabila, whose struggle for the restoration of the Republic dates back to 14 September 1960, the day when the first Congolese democratic experience was interrupted.

The triumph of the Congolese revolution on 17 May 1997 is, after the defeat of apartheid in South Africa, the historic event of greatest political importance in modern Africa. It represents the triumph of the return to pan-Africanism, the only road to salvation for Africa in the circumstances of today's world.

The massive and spontaneous adherence of the Congolese to this armed struggle and the support received from friendly countries and from the entire world is enough to underline the positive nature of this liberation struggle.

The Congolese people are grateful to all for their support of the coming to Kinshasa of a progressive new power concerned with a state of law and improving of the well-being of the people. The victory of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo over the Mobutu dictatorship is indeed a victory of progressive and pan-African Africa over obscurantism, pessimism, morbidness and defeatism, which for such a long time were pretexts for certain Powers to keep political and strategic control of the continent. In that country in which the State and the Republic were moribund, the Government of public security, led by President Laurent-Désiré Kabila, is working tirelessly and incessantly to restore the State and to rebuild the Republic.

The efforts at domestic stabilization through reorganization of the State and the reconciliation of opinions and the return to work of the civilian population are accompanied by other efforts aimed at achieving peace and regional stability in order to create economic and political conditions conducive to productive national and foreign investment.

Our African policy is designed to improve bilateral relations with all the States of the region, help them adapt better to the new geopolitical context and strengthen cooperation and regional integration. Along with the objective of promoting economic development, we are also working to achieve the prevention, management and resolution by Africa of the regional conflicts and crises that are paralysing our continent.

This desire to change our foreign policy is based on our domestic policy, which is designed to rely primarily on our own efforts and to give greater importance to regional and South-South cooperation in our trade activities. Here, emphasis will be placed on trade promoting productive commerce and investments leading to the transfer of new and appropriate technology.

We intend, moreover, to pursue efforts designed to improve our bilateral and multilateral relations with all our partners to ensure greater understanding for and commitment to our programme of national reconstruction. This programme essentially addresses urgent actions and steps for rehabilitation, and their highly humanitarian nature deserves the unconditional support of the international community.

This Government programme comprises the following priorities: infrastructure for transportation and communication, agriculture, health and social services, national education, job creation and the elimination of unemployment, safety and protection of individuals and property and, in addition, peace and national and regional stability.

In the four months in which we have been leading the State, we have been able to achieve encouraging results, in particular at the political and diplomatic levels. These include ensuring the safety of the population through the restoration of justice; guaranteeing the right of ownership; efforts to eradicate corruption, which had become institutionalized in our country; the reintegration of the military personnel of the former armed forces of Zaire and the establishment of a national republican army; the establishment of good regional relations, in particular through the holding in Kinshasa of a summit of Heads of State designed to work on strengthening regional cooperation; the working visits to Kinshasa by the Presidents of Uganda, Rwanda, Eritrea and Tanzania, as well as the visits of the Congolese Head of State to Angola, South Africa, Rwanda, Namibia and Zambia. Furthermore, our Government has participated in meetings held in the subregion on specific regional

issues. We should also note that President Kabila has been consulted by the actors in the current crisis in Brazzaville.

Economic steps include overcoming inflation and the revaluation of the local currency, the decline in food prices, the provision of essentials to urban centres, a monetary reform project now under way and the restructuring of the central bank.

Social and cultural steps include a resumption of cultural and artistic life, a resumption of primary and secondary education despite a difficult situation for parents who work for the State, providing drinking water for the capital and electrification and public road projects.

In the debate at this session on proposals for reforming the United Nations, I would like, at the outset, to state that the strategic objective of all of the reforms envisaged must be to provide better conditions for the proper functioning of the Organization so that it can fulfil its founders' dream of a lasting, democratic, responsible and credible Organization.

The first stage of the effort must be to assess the impact of the cold war on the original system of collective security. Since the cold war paralysed the system set out in the Charter, the end of the cold war should create conditions favourable to the triumph of the collective security regime provided for in Chapter VII of the Charter. The second stage will be to analyse why the continual progress of preventive diplomacy is accompanied by inefficiencies at the operational level in peacekeeping and peace-building. Furthermore, we must also consider the political powers of the main agent of preventive diplomacy to ensure that they conform to institutional limits.

Our position with regard to the administrative reforms of the United Nations and the enlargement of the Security Council is that of Africa as a whole, as set out and defended by the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity. We are opposed to cosmetic reforms and to having members of the Security Council acting as mere figureheads.

Our interest in reform should not make us forget the numerous conflict situations and threats to peace and international security throughout the world. Today Africa continues to occupy centre stage with regard to armed conflicts. Central Africa in particular has become a powder keg as a result of uncontrolled armed bands crossing almost all our borders, bands who, in the guise of refugees, are destabilizing the entire region.

That is why we urgently appeal to the United Nations to do everything it can to end its present policy of burying its head in the sand, which can only result in weakening and destabilizing those, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, that have a role to play in the subregion.

It is now clear that the crisis in Brazzaville, for example, is increasingly escaping the control of the parties to the conflict, and requires an urgent Security Council meeting. This crisis is unacceptable to the Congolese in both Brazzaville and Kinshasa. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has been subjected to deliberate shelling from neighbouring Brazzaville, which has been receiving refugees fleeing that country and which, since 29 and 30 September 1997 has suffered loss of human life, without being a party to the conflict, believes that the conflict has reached the limit of what can be tolerated, given the damage to its people and the threat it represents to regional and international peace and security. Just this morning we learned that more shells had fallen on Kinshasa, and this is unacceptable to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Central African Republic, which was badly battered by the rebellions in the Kasayi camp, must benefit from special cooperation from the United Nations to strengthen the Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements, which is already operational on the ground.

We firmly support the Lusaka Protocol, which is designed to re-establish peace and stability in Angola, a country with which we share a frontier of 2,600 kilometres. We therefore demand that the Protocol be strictly respected, and we condemn the repeated violations of its terms by UNITA.

With regard to Burundi, we support the Arusha process, and adhere to the principle of democracy and security for all.

In Sierra Leone, we hope to see a return to legality and the democratic exercise of power.

We welcome the return of peace to Liberia, and the electoral victory of President Charles Taylor, and we hope that this experience will become a landmark and a point of reference for neighbouring States. The march towards democratization in Africa is inevitable and irreversible, but the road is one which only the Africans can set out on and walk down.

I should like to hail here the American initiative to hold a ministerial-level meeting of the Security Council to strengthen the capacity of African States to build peace through conflict prevention and management and by the improvement of good governance.

The situation in the Middle East remains worrying. The Democratic Republic of the Congo urges all parties strictly to respect the Madrid and Oslo agreements, and in all cases to give priority to genuine dialogue. The prize of peace is won through tolerance.

In the Far East, the reunification of Korea is a peaceful process that the Democratic Republic of the Congo fully supports. We hope for a positive outcome to the negotiations under way.

Global peace is also threatened by environmental problems and by the continuation of the debt crisis of the least developed countries. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has significant global forest reserves, appeals to the international community for assistance in preserving its forest heritage.

My country, whose foreign debt amounts to $14 billion, calls upon the major donors to demonstrate greater solidarity and adopt a more responsible and consistent approach to possible solutions. In the specific case of the Congo, which has been devastated, we wonder what good those billions of dollars did, as the country is in a state of total ruin — without roads, bridges, schools or hospitals. It is public knowledge that these funds never reached the Congo, and were for the most part deposited in American, European and Asian banks. That is why we call for the pure and simple cancellation of this debt; if necessary, we will request the cooperation of the United Nations for the restoration to the Congo of the $14 billion, now circulating in the world.

We should like here solemnly to express our gratitude to the Governments of the Republic of South Africa, the Kingdom of Belgium, the Swiss Confederation and the United States for their cooperation in this matter, and hope that everything possible will be done for a positive outcome to the processes under way.

In any case, the insolvency of my country and of other African countries is a global problem that requires consistent global treatment. It is therefore unfortunate that international cooperation in this area is only serving to intensify it and, furthermore, that any new contribution to national reconstruction is conditional on the payment of arrears.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo supports all the initiatives and recommendations relating to the restoration of cultural property confiscated in the past by colonial Powers. In the same spirit, we support the establishment of an international criminal court, which would have competence over political economic, social, cultural and humanitarian crimes.

Disarmament issues and their relationship with development are also on our foreign policy agenda. While welcoming the Secretary-General's initiative to establish a new department for disarmament, the Democratic Republic of the Congo would have liked to have been apprised of how matters stood regarding the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva to avoid duplication of efforts.

We hope that the United Nations will continue its efforts to guarantee a world free from nuclear weapons and that efforts aimed at general and complete disarmament in regard to conventional weapons bear fruit.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a party to the Ottawa process on anti-personnel landmines. It condemns both manufacturers and users and hopes that condemnation of these weapons will go hand in hand with a genuine will to find international settlements for civil wars and to prosecute individuals responsible for those wars for crimes against humanity.

I could not conclude my remarks without mentioning the general situation in the Great Lakes region, particularly the Rwandan refugees and the United Nations commission of inquiry on the allegations of massacres in the east of our country.

The world campaign for human and humanitarian rights orchestrated against the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo and against the Government of His Excellency the President, Mr. Laurent-Désiré Kabila, in some ways recalls the deplorable and unfortunate United Nations intervention in the Congo in 1960.

Our position is that the problem of refugees, whether they be Hutus or not, must remain a humanitarian issue and can in no way become a political issue. Therefore, any attempt to politicize it should be

condemned because it goes against the spirit and letter of the Charter of our Organization.

With particular regard to the question of the alleged Rwandan refugees and the allegations that they were massacred, the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to repeat, for anyone who wants to listen, that it has nothing to hide. Moreover, we have never concealed our moral concern regarding the Rwandan women and children who were taken hostage and fell victim to Rwandan extremists bent on genocide. What we do dispute in this matter is the fact that the former Rwandan armed forces and the militia, the INTERAHAMWE, are classed as refugees, which totally disregards the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and the relevant convention of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

Here, I should like to call to witness the Security Council, some of whose members rightly refused to subscribe to the idea of an international intervention force led by Canada for the simple reason that the real Rwandan refugees had returned to Rwanda. The armed bands who went from Kibu as far as Congo (Brazzaville), the Central African Republic and regions of Angola controlled by the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) are not refugees. They are hostage-takers and no one has the right to ignore that.

In two and a half years, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and all kinds of humanitarian agencies could not repatriate more than 100 refugees to Rwanda. While they spent more than $1 billion, to the tune of $1.2 million per day, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo was able to assist in the voluntary repatriation, in conditions of full security and dignity, of over 700,000 Rwandan refugees in four days. In the same way, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo had called more than three ceasefires for humanitarian reasons. That same movement had opened humanitarian corridors -- road, rail and air -- to allow for and assist the repatriation of Rwandan refugees. That same movement had fed and cared for the so-called refugees, whom today it is accused of having massacred, in the equatorial forest.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a place of refuge and anyone who is being persecuted anywhere in the world will find asylum there in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the relevant OAU convention. Thus, the Congolese from Brazzaville were welcomed shortly after the Rwandans were repatriated but, paradoxically,

(*spoke in English*)

these refugees did not receive the same attention from the international community as the Rwandan refugees. They happen to be second-class refugees.

(*spoke in French*)

Can people at least realize what kind of and how great a toll the presence of Rwandan refugees, particularly of members of the former Rwandan armed forces and INTERAHAMWE, in the Congo will have taken? Has anyone taken the trouble to assess the impact of the activities of these phoney refugees on the territory of the Congo?

And since we could not speak of refugees without mentioning the United Nations commission of inquiry, I would like to make the most of this opportunity to draw the attention of this Assembly to the clearly humanitarian nature of the mission of the commission. In no way should it turn itself into a political mission, as it has been trying to do so far. It should be understood that its deployment in the field must not violate our independence and sovereignty. Our confidence in the international Organization is neither a sign of weakness nor a failure to see, in this particular case, that there are plans afoot to use these structures to undermine certain forces.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has accepted, and I repeat,

(*spoke in English*)

we have accepted that the team can do its work and we are expecting it to go ahead and do the work. Our Government will do anything in its power to make sure that the team does its work. However, the team will then have to answer a certain number of questions, especially in the eastern part of our country. Mainly, who did what, when, why, with whose help? The team will have to tell us why the refugees were armed. The team will have to tell us who armed them. Why were they not disarmed? The team will have to tell us how many amongst the refugees were really refugees and how many were pseudo-refugees. The team will say how many Congolese people were butchered by these people who have been called refugees, but more importantly, the team will tell us if there was any continuation of Rwandese genocide

on Congolese soil because, as the Assembly knows, the same people who committed genocide in Rwanda crossed the border with their arms, with their machetes, with their ideology, and they continued their work in our country. And, more importantly, the team will establish the responsibility of everybody in that matter. But let me repeat again, our Government is willing to help the team, to give full access to the team, so that the team can go ahead and do its work.

(*spoke in French*)

I should like to conclude my statement today with a message from Mr. Laurent-Désiré Kabila, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which reads:

> "My country has lost a great deal of time because of the injustices of the cold war. My people ask only one thing: to build the well-being and prosperity they need, in full sovereignty and with respect for the sovereignty of others. We thank all those countries that are willing to assist us in our recovery.
>
> "We have no other ambition. We are only convinced that the world opinion that will satisfy us can come only from ourselves. What we ask of the other nations of the world is that they assist us in seeing that those who are not in agreement with our view of things cannot thwart us."

World peace is one and indivisible, and the principle of collective responsibility obliges all of us to take that into account.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Shara'.

Mr. Al-Shara' (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I take pleasure in congratulating the President on his election to preside over the fifty-second session of the General Assembly and to congratulate his friendly country on his election to that high international office. We are confident that his wide-ranging expertise will facilitate his task and lead the deliberations of this session to a successful end.

I should also like to thank his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Razali Ismail, for his wise leadership of the previous session of the General Assembly.

On this occasion I cannot fail to renew my congratulations to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to Africa, his great continent. I wish him full success in discharging his tasks in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Charter.

Although more than 50 years have elapsed since the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations, and although States have since committed themselves to peace in their international relations, many regions of the world, particularly in the Middle East, continue to suffer occupation, aggression and the threat of aggression to a point where the sounds of war have begun to drown out that of peace.

It has now become clear to most of those concerned with peace and security in various corners of the Earth that the peace process initiated at the Madrid Conference six years ago has reached a dead end. This is due to the volte-face by the current Israeli Government vis-à-vis that process, including the commitments, agreements and pledges stemming from it. It is also due to its cynicism towards all the strenuous international efforts seeking, for the first time in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, to achieve a comprehensive solution to this conflict.

Perhaps many of us, Governments as well as peoples, cannot foresee the extent of the serious repercussions that will result from that Israeli reversal on the peace process, particularly since it is taking place in the post-cold-war period, when wars and armed confrontations have taken ugly and barbaric forms and have often raged out of control. Syria, which has opted for the achievement of peace in the Middle East on the basis of justice and dignity as a strategic choice, finds that it is duty bound to train a spotlight from this important international rostrum on some facts concerning the positions of the current Israeli Government. This should enable the international community, with the sponsors of the peace process foremost among them, to beware of any serious developments in the future leading to undermining the security and stability of the Middle East region and beyond.

As a preliminary observation, I must point out that in our reading of the policy of the Israeli Government we do not proceed from the perception widely held around the world which classifies it as an extremist Zionist Government bent on negating the other party to the conflict rather than making peace with it. We proceed merely from an objective description of declared positions of the Israeli Government and from its practices

on the ground, which — at a minimum — aim at gradually backtracking from the commitments and agreements reached by the parties during the peace talks and ultimately at completely eradicating the peace process launched at the Madrid Conference.

It seems to us that the method now employed by the Israeli Government to reach that objective is not the usual one of one step forward, two steps back. It is now a new practice, a tactic of one step back, then two steps back, followed by a threat of a further step backwards which cannot be abandoned, even provisionally, until the other side accepts new conditions it had already rejected. Thus, the peace process regresses until it ultimately cancels itself out.

In this context, some may find it unfairly prejudicial to the Israeli Government to characterize its practices in such terms. They would, however, be surprised to learn that the Head of the Israeli Government himself boasts to his inner circle of employing such a tactic, which he believes is a very astute means of ending the peace process as unobtrusively as possible.

This does not stop at the *modus operandi* alone, but extends to the details of the very fundamental issues underpinning the peace process. While acknowledging the applicability of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) to the occupied Syrian Golan, he also simultaneously rejects the results reached on the Syrian track, with the participation of the United States as sponsor, on the basis of those resolutions and relating to withdrawal to the line of 4 June 1967. He further rejects the resumption of negotiations from the point at which they were halted.

It is also strange that the Israeli Government rejects the formula of land for peace, though it is at the very core of the United States initiative and has always enjoyed international unanimity. Instead of accepting this formula, the head of the Israeli Government advances others that neither common sense nor logic could entertain and that cannot stand the test of time, such as the formula of peace for peace or peace for security. It is clear that accepting these two Israeli formulas would be tantamount to surrender and to becoming an instrument at the service of Israel's security.

It is indeed true that security issues are of the utmost importance to all States, peoples and individuals. That is not in doubt. However, security is the fruit of peace; the achievement of peace brings security and not vice versa. Proceeding from that, we believe that the Israeli Government, in giving priority in its policy to security over peace, runs counter to all the concepts defined by societies and warring States throughout history. It is no exaggeration to say that the insistence of the Israeli Government on its erroneous concept of achieving security before ending occupation will turn the peace process into a bloodletting process, a cycle of killing that will obtain neither security nor peace for Israel and may return the Arab-Israeli conflict to its tragic beginnings.

The Charter of the United Nations states that the efforts of the peoples of the world must be concerted in order to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Respect for the commitments proceeding from the principles of international law and its sources lies at the very heart of the Charter. It is regrettable that the Israeli Government does not realize that its failure to respect the commitments reached with the previous Government on the Syrian track, based on the principles of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, does not represent a mere legal violation. First and foremost, it casts doubt on the credibility of any previous Israeli Government, and such doubts thus apply to the commitments made by the current Administration when it is replaced.

Since coming to power, the Israeli Government has not limited its positions to undermining the peace process. It has chosen the exact opposite path to that of peace. It has increasingly diversified its attacks against Lebanon; it has bombed cities teeming with civilians and has planted explosive devices in many parts of southern Lebanon in order to incite enmity among the Lebanese and cast aspersions on the role of the Lebanese resistance. However, such attempts, contrary to Israel's objectives, have only solidified unity among the Lebanese. They have strengthened the resolve of the Lebanese resistance to confront Israeli occupation more than ever before. In the occupied Palestinian territories, the pace of settlement activities has escalated, including a sharing of roles between the Israeli Government and extremist settlers, in order to expropriate more land, destroy homes and maintain the drive to judaize East Jerusalem.

In our occupied Syrian Golan, the policy of entrenching Israeli occupation has also been escalated to the point that the Israeli Knesset recently voted on a bill entrenching the occupation and impeding withdrawal from the Golan, in clear defiance of Security Council resolution 497 (1981). This has been accompanied by an

intensification of Jewish settlement activity with the aim of swelling the numbers of settlers in the Golan and undermining the chances for peace. That is a flagrant violation of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the first additional Protocol thereof. The Golan is Syrian land — it always was and always will be. The Israelis will have to leave it sooner or later.

We, the Arabs, have championed just and comprehensive peace and consider it a strategic choice. For such a choice to be realistic and supported by the people, it requires full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, as well as from southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa, in implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). It must guarantee the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, including those to self-determination and their own independent State.

Syria has always stressed its keen wish to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Syria once again expresses its grave concern at the serious obstacle that Israel has placed on the road to that goal in order to prevent the establishment of the zone by refusing to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). This intransigent Israeli position does great harm to the credibility and universality of the Treaty. We believe that the measures and arrangements to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, as called for by United Nations resolutions, require Israel, the only State in the region possessing nuclear facilities and stockpiles, to adhere to the NPT and place all its nuclear establishments under the full-scope safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency. It must further destroy its entire stockpile of nuclear weapons.

At a time when the urgent need to intensify international efforts towards a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is very clear, some States of the region are engaging in military cooperation similar to an alliance and have recently declared their intention to conduct military manoeuvres in the eastern Mediterranean. Such manoeuvres would be a threat to the peace and safety of neighbouring States as well as to the stability of the region.

Syria supports all the efforts being made to eliminate tension in various regions of the world and to resolve standing problems. In this context, Syria underlines its concern for the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq. Syria calls for easing the suffering of the brotherly people of Iraq, while Iraq is required to implement the remaining Security Council resolutions in a manner ensuring a just solution to the issue of Kuwaiti prisoners.

We also hope that there will be a positive response to the initiatives of the League of Arab States and the Organization of African Unity, as well as towards the flexibility shown by the Libyan Government to resolve the Lockerbie crisis. We would also like to see the embargo against Libya — a fellow Arab country — lifted, as well as an end to the suffering caused to the brotherly Libyan people by that embargo.

Syria supports measures to guarantee peace and security in the Korean peninsula. We also wish to express our support for the aspirations of the Korean people for reunification. We further hope that serious efforts will be made to provide assistance to the Korean people to overcome its economic crisis.

Syria stresses the need to take the necessary steps as soon as possible to lift the economic, trade and financial embargo which has been imposed on Cuba for more than 30 years.

Syria is following with concern the severe conflicts afflicting some African countries. We call on the international community to make the necessary efforts and to endeavour to find solutions to these disputes, in close cooperation with the Organization of African Unity, in order to promote peace and stability on the African continent. The international community is further called upon to provide assistance of all kinds to enable African States to eradicate the scourge of poverty and achieve development.

Among its primary purposes, the Charter of the United Nations provides for the maintenance of international peace and security; the fostering between nations of international relations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples; international cooperation in the economic, social, cultural and humanitarian fields; and the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. It also calls for non-interference in the internal affairs of States. The Charter encouraged the establishment of specialized agencies in the field of international cooperation. It entrusted the General Assembly with setting out regulations governing the appointment by the Secretary-General of the employees of the international Organization. Syria underlines the importance of strict adherence to the purposes and principles of the United Nations during the process of reform of the Organization

in order to enable it to respond to the needs and aspirations of its Members in the twenty-first century.

We believe that promoting development is among the first priorities of the United Nations. There is therefore a need to underscore the right to development.

Syria expresses its concern about any weakening of the role and working methods of the General Assembly. We call upon the General Assembly to perform its effective role in accordance with the Charter.

In this context, we believe that the changes in the international arena and the significant increase in the number of Member States of the United Nations call for a review of the composition and working methods of the Security Council. Checks and criteria must be put in place to prevent the arbitrary use of the veto power. Thus the democracy and transparency which are required in its decision-making would be enhanced, thereby leading to more fairness and balance, as well as to non-selectivity in the implementation of the Council's resolutions. Although this is an urgent matter, we believe that, in order to reach general agreement on this question, the reforms of the Security Council must not be subjected to a specific time-frame.

The Secretary-General recently presented his proposals to reform the United Nations. We appreciate the efforts he made in preparing his proposals. However, proceeding from our concern to strengthen the United Nations capacity to shoulder the responsibilities entrusted to it, we would have wished to have seen in the proposals more attention given to the fundamental role of the Organization in promoting international cooperation for development. We would have liked the proposals to exclude any measures likely to affect those programmes and activities related to development issues and poverty eradication in developing and least developed countries.

Human rights are a very important issue, which we believe must continue to be pursued as an independent issue in order to avoid any overlap with other United Nations activities. Such an amalgamation of issues would only further the opportunities to politicize human rights issues and their use as a means to exert specific pressures, to impose preconditions or to intervene in the internal affairs of States.

Humanity has pinned great hopes on the United Nations, an Organization born of a world war which was destructive to great hopes. Humanity entertained the expectation that the Organization would succeed in outlawing war, ending all forms of aggression and championing the right of peoples to self-determination. It further expected it to succeed in achieving development and in eradicating poverty and underdevelopment.

Today, as we stand at the threshold of a new century, we all face great challenges which require us to find the appropriate enabling environment for future generations to live in peace, security and cooperation within the context of international relations free of violence and confrontation. This is the hope of our peoples and this is what we must strive to reach as we look forward to a better future that is more just and more humane for the benefit of all mankind.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malawi, His Excellency The Honourable Mr. Mapopa Chipeta, MP, on whom I now call.

Mr. Chipeta (Malawi): I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to the President on his assumption of the office of the presidency of the fifty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly. His election to preside during this critical stage of change and reform in the United Nations system is a reflection of the confidence that the entire membership has in him and his country, Ukraine. I wish him a successful term of office, and assure him of Malawi's full cooperation.

Allow me to pay tribute to last year's President, His Excellency Mr. Razali Ismail, for the excellent manner in which he handled the recently concluded fifty-first session of the General Assembly. President Razali Ismail brought with him a refreshing sense of purpose in the work of the General Assembly and the United Nations. His punctuality and forthrightness are attributes which will inspire us all as we move forward. My delegation wishes him well in all his future endeavours.

Special tribute is due to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who, within a short period of time, has demonstrated that a revitalized United Nations can work meaningfully towards the full realization of the principles and purposes of the Charter. He can count on Malawi's support as he continues to discharge his responsibilities.

Malawi welcomes the reforms that are taking place within the Organization. The Secretary-General's commendable efforts in this regard will surely complement the work that has been, and continues to be,

undertaken through the various intergovernmental processes. My delegation expresses its satisfaction with the recent adoption of the report of the General Assembly's High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System. By focusing attention on the institutional aspects and operations of the United Nations, the outcome of the Working Group represents an indispensable input to the overall programme of reform. The two-track programme of reform submitted to us by the Secretary General adds, in our view, a comprehensive and useful thrust in the reform and transformation of this world body. My delegation looks forward to participating in the consultations that are necessary to carry through these proposals during this session.

We welcome, too, the conclusion of negotiations on An Agenda for Development. We need a strong United Nations in development — a United Nations that is efficient, effective, relevant, able and well-resourced, to respond to the many needs of Member States. Such an Organization, however, cannot exist without meaningful progress in the other areas of reform. We therefore look for some tangible progress in the work of the Working Groups on An Agenda for Peace, on Security Council reform and on the financial situation of the United Nations during the current session.

Last year my delegation observed that Malawi did not believe that the Working Groups that we had established were open-ended in time. We continue to hold this view. We need to seize the opportunity for change when the time is ripe. While a time-frame may not be imposed, we believe the time for change for the Organization is now, as we approach the next millennium. Progress in the three remaining Working Groups will make complete the changes that we all seek for the Organization.

It is now over three years since the dawn of true democracy in Malawi. The Government of Malawi continues to work towards consolidation of good governance and respect for human rights. We seek to build a Malawi that is democratic and economically viable. Malawi has made commendable efforts to improve the promotion, protection and enforcement of human rights. A number of independent institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights are now in place.

Let me also note that Malawi has acceded to the major international human rights instruments. With regard to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming at the Abolition of the Death Penalty, the Government has decided to hold national consultations on whether or not the death penalty should be abolished. The initiative, whose modalities are being worked out, has received wide publicity. In this regard, I wish to register Malawi's appreciation for the offer of assistance by Amnesty International to facilitate these consultations. In the meantime, our President, His Excellency Dr. Bakili Muluzi, has announced a stay until the outcome of the national consultations is known.

With respect to the combat of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, Malawi has acceded to the 1988 Convention, and activities are under way to put in place an effective administrative machinery to coordinate the activities of government departments and civil society. We expect to establish a national commission on drug control as a focal point for internal and international activities, including the promotion of cooperation within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region in the fight against drug-trafficking. Malawi would greatly appreciate any assistance from the international community, including the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, to improve our own and the region's ability to deal with the drug problem.

We continue to make strides in socio-economic development. Against the background of prudent economic management, we have succeeded in arresting rising inflation and the stagnation in industry and construction as well as the total loss of confidence in the business sector. Although the situation is currently manageable, we are the first to realize that much more needs to be done. Like many other small countries, our economy continues to weather stormy turbulence caused by many exogenous factors. Drought has wrought havoc in the region in recent years. According to the current forecast, this season the region will experience yet another drought. Poverty continues to be the main source of concern. There is no doubt that democracy in Malawi has engendered massive expectations among the people, especially after having lived in an atmosphere of deprivation for decades. The level of expectation has generated insurmountable pressure on the limited resources which the Government has at its disposal.

As a developing country, and one of the least developed among them, we are not yet able to mobilize adequate resources to accomplish all our national development programmes. Recurrent drought in the southern Africa region this decade, the weak economic

base of the country, which is almost exclusively agricultural, a rather unbalanced social infrastructure, which is partly due to the low literacy rate inherited from the previous regime, and the problem of disease, including HIV/AIDS, pose a serious threat to our nascent democracy. A combination of these domestic as well as other factors of an international character bear the frightening potential of reversing the noble gains we have made over the past three years.

Despite these adverse forces, the Government is determined to broaden the economic base of our country. Political stability now obtaining in the country has created a conducive atmosphere for foreign investment. Malawi has abolished all retrogressive legislation which hindered both domestic and foreign investment. The economy has been liberalized, and a number of incentives have been introduced for potential investors. Measures include a comprehensive privatization programme.

In a further effort to tackle the root cause of poverty in my country, our Government has instituted measures which seek to empower the common person, including youth, and women. Free primary education was introduced in 1994 to develop our human resources. This is coupled with the provision of free tuition at secondary school for the girl child. The aim of the Malawi Government is to double the average literacy rate by 1999.

The efforts and impact of globalization are well-known to us all. Malawi cannot go it alone in the implementation of its development programmes. International cooperation among all nations in all sectors of human endeavour is no longer an option, but necessary for the very existence and survival of humankind. The truth of this proposition is very apparent and clear today, particularly in the areas of environment, development and international peace and security.

We in Malawi recognize the importance of protecting the environment for the sustainable livelihood of all the people. The Government of Malawi participated in the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, devoted to the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, held in this very Hall from 23 to 27 June 1997. We trust that having candidly taken stock of the state of implementation of Agenda 21, and taking into account the shortfall at mid-decade, the international community will now redouble its efforts to fulfil its commitments in the next five years and beyond. The common and differentiated responsibilities that were agreed upon at the Earth Summit regarding the protection and preservation of the environment in order to achieve sustainable development were reaffirmed and accentuated, once again underscoring the importance of international cooperation. We will play our part in the protection of the environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

The critical socio-economic situation of Africa continues to be an area of priority concern to us. More than one year after the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, the situation still leaves something to be desired — though there are, of course, some hopeful signs for improvement. We find gratification in the fact that African ownership of African development is becoming a reality. We look forward to the consolidation of a global partnership for Africa. Malawi appreciates the assistance that it receives from the donor community. There is absolutely no doubt that increased international assistance and initiatives for debt relief or cancellation, increased official development assistance to meet agreed targets, private capital flows, increased foreign direct investment, and improved terms of trade would play a catalytic role in Africa's efforts to achieve economic development. The remarkable progress achieved in the areas of regional integration and South-South cooperation gives us hope. Africa is indeed not a hopeless case. A genuine partnership in development and finance is, therefore, imperative.

The demise of the cold war rekindled all our aspirations for lasting global peace and prosperity. The highly symbolic tumbling down of the Berlin Wall heightened expectations for a peace dividend. Unfortunately, the situation has not improved. Today, the United Nations continues to utilize most of its resources in managing or containing conflicts of varying origins and intensity. The role of the Organization in the maintenance of international peace and security has become more relevant than before. The situations in Angola, Burundi, the Republic of the Congo, the Great Lakes Region, Sierra Leone, Western Sahara, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Middle East, among many others, continue to occupy the work of this Organization.

It certainly should be possible to resolve many of these problems that beset the world so that the United Nations can rechannel its efforts towards promoting the most refreshing aspects of the human experience. And there are many examples where the human spirit has triumphed over forces of doom and despair.

Developments in Liberia and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are among the most recent examples.

We congratulate the people of Liberia on choosing the way of peace. The role played by the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), by the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group, and by other international observers in the Liberian peace and electoral processes once again demonstrates that a global partnership for the maintenance of international peace and security can succeed and is perhaps the only way forward.

Democracy, transparent and accountable governance and the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms are necessary for successful people-centred development to take place in our countries. It is unfortunate, though, that there are some around us today who believe that they can continue to deprive their own people of their birth rights and freedoms. We deeply regret that in Sierra Leone a military junta that usurped power from a democratically elected Government is still holding on, in spite of the international community's opposition. Malawi calls upon the junta to hand over power to the democratically elected Government and President Kabbah so that the people of Sierra Leone can experience the peace that has eluded them for so long.

The situation in Burundi continues to be as depressing as it was last year. We remain convinced that there is no alternative to freedom and democracy. We strongly urge the people of Burundi to set aside their differences and negotiate so that they may put in place a Government that would bring that country once again to normalcy.

My Government has followed closely developments in the painstaking peace process for Angola. We have admired the magnanimity of the Government of Angola in fulfilling its obligations under the Lusaka Protocol and related agreements. We on the other hand regret the continued intransigence of Dr. Jonas Savimbi and his National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). While supporting wholeheartedly the Security Council resolutions on the situation in Angola, we make an earnest appeal to the UNITA leadership to fulfil its obligations in the peace process without further delay so that the people of Angola and the entire southern African region may realize their desire for a peaceful and prosperous future.

We similarly regret the recent developments in the Republic of the Congo. We appeal to all the major players in this senseless struggle to exercise restraint and amicably resolve their differences. The Congolese people definitely deserve much better.

We note with growing concern the apparent lack of meaningful progress in the implementation of the settlement plan for Western Sahara. Malawi applauds the indefatigable efforts of the United Nations in its search for a lasting solution to Western Sahara. It is our sincere hope that the recent appointment by the Secretary-General of Mr. James Baker as his Personal Envoy for Western Sahara will help in the resolution of that problem. We call upon the main actors to honour their obligations without further delay.

My delegation is gravely concerned about developments in the Middle East. A few years back, we hailed the Middle East peace process as having acquired irreversible momentum. Malawi strongly believes that there is no alternative to the peace process launched in Madrid on 10 October 1991; there is no cogent alternative to this process for genuine peace and stability in the Middle East. However, recent developments have obviously shown that any provocative moves by any of the parties concerned will not help the process. We appeal for the utmost restraint and the quick resumption of negotiations.

My Government is similarly pleased to note that the two Governments on the Korean peninsula are working together, although in a limited sense. It is our hope that this is a starting point from which a lasting solution to the existing tensions on the peninsula will be realized.

In recent years the world has made major strides in the field of disarmament. The adoption last year of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was indeed a major breakthrough for all peace-loving nations. For Malawi, however, the recent adoption of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction stands out as most significant. Our resolve to root out an evil that has adversely affected the lives of many in the world shall remain undeterred. The support garnered for the Convention within a short period of time is a clear sign of what human beings can achieve when working together for a common goal. We welcome the Convention and look forward to its universal acceptance.

The United Nations today stands at the threshold of a new millennium. We pray that it continues to play its rightful role in the many issues that occupy us all in our everyday life. As we approach the twenty-first century,

the relevance of the United Nations in enhancing international cooperation in all areas of human endeavour is, to us, no longer a matter of doubt but reality. We believe that the reforms we all desire will harness the gains already made in the area of international cooperation. We all seek a United Nations that responds effectively and efficiently to the needs of all people.

Let me reaffirm the commitment of the Government and the people of Malawi to the noble goals and ideals of the United Nations, an institution that continues to make a difference for humankind. We will continue to make our modest contribution to this intergovernmental process, for which we find no credible or viable alternative to its service to "We the peoples of the United Nations".

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, Mr. Roberto Robaina González.

Mr. Robaina González (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Ernesto Che Guevara, Commander, Minister and head of the Cuban delegation to the nineteenth session of the General Assembly, stated 33 years ago, from this very rostrum:

> "We wish to see this Assembly stretch its limbs and march forward; we want the Committees to begin their work, which should not stop at the first confrontation." [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Nineteenth Session, Plenary Meetings, 1299th meeting, para. 81*]

And, as if he could already see the present, he added:

> "Imperialism seeks to convert this meeting into a pointless competition in oratory, to prevent it from solving the serious problems of the world; that design we must frustrate." (*Ibid.*)

At that time, on our planet some 700 million people were illiterate; 200 million were unemployed; and over 1 billion were eking out a precarious existence. That reality contravened the principle that humans are the source of development, as well as its agents and beneficiaries, and should be considered, above all, as the justification and purpose of development.

As the years went by, the situation worsened. Today, not only are the industrialized nations imposing conditions on or denying outright a meagre share of their plentiful resources as official development assistance for the development of the poorest nations, but some of them, like ostriches, are burying their head in the sand and disregarding that obligation.

Although missions to Mars are widely publicized and assurances are given that the world economy is growing, the distressing truth remains that today in the world a billion people are illiterate; as many are unemployed or underemployed; and more than 2 billion are living under subhuman conditions.

Among these, we note with dismay, are the 425,000 children worldwide who, since Tuesday, 16 September, when this session started, have died from preventable diseases. Those 425,000 children were sacrificed in the name of efficiency, quality and consumption — a pattern of consumption that today requires an irrational and unsustainable development, to which those children never even had access.

Time is not just slipping by; we are letting it slip through our fingers. With it, we are losing also our opportunities to save our planet, which is sick and beset in a thousand ways because the men and women who have been gathering here for the last 52 years on behalf of our peoples have in many cases been unable consistently to translate words into deeds.

Why, on the threshold of a new century, should we allow such a crime to take place? Where is that promised land, that higher society, that paradise craved by millions of human beings? How can we dream today, when the overwhelming majority of human beings cannot even sleep because violence, hunger and disease keep them awake?

Over five decades ago, the nations of the world decided to unite against war and to work in peace for progress and cooperation among peoples. But since then, no one has enjoyed real and lasting peace. As many people have become the victims of violence and armed conflicts in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall as were killed in the 15-year Viet Nam war.

Our memory has become so short that those same people who raised their voices against the German capital's concrete wall now justify, promote and even stand up for a 10-times larger and much more heavily fortified wall that would divide the poor South from the developed North, along the Rio Grande all the way to Baja California, and which very few dare to denounce.

Likewise, an absurd hypocrisy allows military expenditures to be the number one business in the world, with close to $900 billion in circulation, followed by drug smuggling, with upwards of $500 billion, while as much money is invested in a modern bomber as would be required to relieve the foreign debt of the 20 countries most heavily burdened by that scourge.

"Divide and conquer": the Roman maxim for subduing the ancient world is increasingly and ever more forcefully becoming the slogan of the era of outer space and information superhighways. The only form of concerted action that seems to be fully consolidated is the one that, from here, proposes and undertakes humanitarian interventions and operations aimed at enforcing, maintaining or consolidating peace and democracy in the wake of conflicts; preventive and early-warning actions; and all those various ways of disguising new wars.

If we fail to stop this, the upcoming third millennium will not find peaceful and generous comity among nations. Nor will it bring any closer the anticipated miracle of multiplying loaves and fishes for all through development and rational exchange. On the contrary, consumerism, environmental deterioration, illiteracy, xenophobia, terrorism, drug addiction, famine, AIDS, prostitution and all those visible symptoms of the human rationality immunodeficiency syndrome that our planet is suffering from will devour us. Can it be, as one poet says, that people are mean and undeserving and we should therefore accept the idea that the already foreseen end of history will be followed by the end of the human race?

If we resign ourselves to the fact that 285 people can possess riches equal to the ill-apportioned wealth of 2.5 billion other human beings, it might be that a doomsday of similar proportions awaits us should we fail to change the course of events. Just one detail: were it not for the 2.5 billion people doomed to sacrifice, it would be very unlikely that the other 285 people could survive, regardless of how much more wealth they would be able to accumulate.

All these problems belong to this world, not another. They are ours, as much as these "Disunited Nations", which we are unable to cast into a true gathering of Governments and peoples designed to change and save our planet.

In the light of these problems, many of us wonder whether the words of a powerful minority are worth more than the lives of that overwhelming majority of human beings who for many reasons are not only deprived of their right to say a word, but also lack the resolution and the power to exercise that right when they do have it.

We also wonder how there can be talk of multilateralism when we see an endlessly increasing unilateralism and when the so-called de-ideologized world imposes on us a sole and exclusive ideology. Something is wrong when speeches on plurality are made while attempts are made to impose uniformity on the world; things are even worse if, instead of everyone having the same rights and duties — as should be the case — in fact, a few have more and more rights whereas the vast majority only get more and more duties.

We dedicated the decade which is just concluding to international law with a view to honouring it with concrete actions. However, in this very building there have been talks and negotiations about, and even votes against, these principles and international law itself. We should ask ourselves once again when we will actually conclude the agreements on nuclear disarmament, and when the use of force or threats will be once and for all banned in international relations. Why allow certain Powers to pursue with impunity the arms race, their military hegemony and the defiant nuclear tests in laboratories and computers while they try to ban them for the rest?

How can we stop those who split whole nations apart, prevent their peaceful reunification and finance and arm regimes that violate human rights? All the endeavours to establish a new, just and equitable economic world order, free of humiliating conditions and restrictive and onerous practices, are brutally challenged by a powerful minority that reserves the worst and cruellest of the infernos for the rest of the planet.

A handful of the rich will never be able to represent the vast multitudes of human beings, deprived every day of their right to know that they are human, multitudes on whom cultural transnationalization imposes an information order capable of homogenizing even the news of their very lives. Nor can one accept that the select club should decree in a totalitarian way the political and juridical order of the peoples, without even asking who we are, where we are coming from and what we rely upon to go where we sovereignly wish. Those belonging to that club, and they alone, are the ones primarily responsible for the fact that today cardinal principles of international law, such as self-determination, national independence, non-interference in domestic affairs, and

particularly respect for the sovereignty of States are questioned.

That is why Cuba asserts our right to differ, and why we reiterate the position expressed by our President more than three decades ago:

> "As long as the concept of sovereignty exists as a prerogative of nations and independent peoples, as a right of all peoples, we do not accept the exclusion of our people from that right. As long as the world is guided by those principles, as long as the world is guided by those concepts, which have universal validity, because they are universally accepted and enshrined by the peoples, we will not accept being deprived of any of those rights; we will not relinquish any of those rights."

For us there is absolutely no doubt that sovereignty continues to be a concept and a prerogative of independent States, and that in today's unipolar world that principle has even more force and validity than ever before.

Economies, cultures and peoples are subjugated under the drum roll of globalization; development becomes as remote as stars to which we cannot travel, and wealth is increasingly polarized. Under the impulse of this globalization, vaunted new technological and scientific displays are poisoning the environment, crushing biodiversity and condemning to extinction the most precarious and wonderful of all species: mankind.

It would be good if that global interdependency could stop the frantic consumption, balance national development patterns, make economies sustainable and multiply the riches of the peoples. Even better, if ideas are to be truly globalized, let us welcome the clamour for urgent reform of this United Nations, as remote from its own origins as it is unable to cope with the era in which we are living. That could be dreamt of, if at least the reform started with a comprehensive and inclusive endeavour, democratizing all its bodies while preserving its universal character, its political essence and its intergovernmental nature.

It is high time to go beyond the rhetoric in which we have been immersed for two years, since we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Organization with talk of reform, with talk about transformations, without saying what, who, how and when. If we are to be occupied, and not only preoccupied, with reform, let us reject, as incompatible with this Organization, the corporate and transnational approach promoted by some of the main United Nations contributors, as if this building were a stock exchange and the just desires of the peoples were mere merchandise.

The reforms must permit the General Assembly to really exercise its prerogatives, including those which have been usurped, while preserving the principle of equality of all Member States, whose genuine political will is essential to advance. Intergovernmental participation in considering and adopting decisions on any reform package should be a fundamental precondition if we really want to tend to the needs of the historically forgotten majority in the world. Likewise, our peoples, especially the poorest ones, will understand only those decisions that are reflected in their lives and homes — not those that satisfy only their Governments.

Cuba also advocates reform that especially strengthens United Nations structures and activities that are related to the promotion of economic and social development. The simplification, rationalization or reorientation of those structures must be the result of a process that always guarantees full completion and implementation of all programmes, mandates and activities in those areas.

The United Nations should recover its real decision-making capacity in other critical issues, such as those related to free trade, development financing and other monetary topics. Any measure handing that role over to the main contributors must be blocked.

Further, we should all endorse again the Charter obligation to contribute to stable and unconditional financing, making possible the effective and efficient implementation of all programmes, priorities, mandates and activities approved by the General Assembly. The approval of a budget for each programme reflecting the total resources required for the Organization to carry out all its activities will be a cornerstone of that endeavour.

Along these lines, we oppose any formula based on the extortion and pressure that are exerted by some countries, particularly by the country which is the main contributor to the United Nations — as well as its deepest debtor, economically and morally speaking.

But to achieve the more democratic, efficient and dynamic United Nations we are dreaming of, it is essential that the reforms reach the heart of one of its principal organs: the Security Council must stop being a bunker impenetrable to the General Assembly's demands

for an equitable and fair expansion. While some of the richest and most powerful States are already taking long strides towards any new seats that might appear, there are attempts to mislead, and even to deny the right of the third world to its due representation on the Council on an equal footing with the rest of the permanent members. Worse yet, the saw of division is once again cutting through the body of the poor to the benefit of the big industrialized countries.

Let us reach agreement once and for all. If we want real security, what we agree upon must not further increase the appalling imbalances that today insult and exterminate us. Hence the importance of reforming the composition and procedures of the Security Council, and of rectifying the largest existing imbalance, by enabling developing countries to become members based on equitable geographical representation and simultaneity of accession by new members.

The Council will never be secure until transparency, democracy and the participation of non-member States forever take the place of the present dangerous and concealed manoeuvres. Peace will never be guaranteed until the obsolete and antidemocratic institution of the veto disappears, or is at least restricted pending its final elimination. That is the only way to prevent the abuses of power that today prevail in this Organization and in the Security Council. By confronting these abuses together, we will prevent the coercive policies and unilateral measures generated by certain States from becoming multilateral.

I know a teenager who is the pride of his parents. He likes baseball, is a good student and dreams an ocean of dreams. But it has recently been discovered that he suffers from leukaemia. The medicines to cure him exist, and the treatment could cost less than $15,000 if we act in time. Cuba has been forced to arrange a discrete transaction to obtain through friendly third parties, and at a total cost of $60,000, the medicines to save that child's life.

That is the blockade: for the price of four treatments, we could afford only one. With the money to save four lives, only one will be saved. But this is not the only example. Despite its very limited income, Cuba continues to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in price differences, surcharges, freight and other additional charges in its imports of fuel, food, medicines and other basic products. Financial credits crucial for the economic recovery and growth were suspended or postponed or became more expensive, while all markets labelled us as a "risk" for fear of the unilateral punishment that could fall on Governments and banks if they lent us money.

On top of all of that, and because of the protectionism of pharmaceutical patents, Cubans have been deprived of free access to medicines that have appeared on the market since 1979, including third-generation antibiotics and other drugs to treat AIDS and cancer.

Cuba has no need to exaggerate the facts. It suffers them first, contemplates them afterwards, and always exposes them with a calm sense of responsibility. The tale of a giant Goliath against a small David could have been taken from the Bible, but the minstrels and chroniclers of the next millennium will find plenty of inspiration in the conflict between the United States and Cuba.

Almost 40 years of resistance and of defence of our bold ideals of independence against our brutal neighbour who covets and loathes us provide us with the authority to speak. More than 35 years of struggle against the cruel and inhumane economic, commercial and financial blockade by the United States of America support our arguments. Every new charge made by Cuba is supported by more than $60 billion in losses — and that is not a full assessment — by an economy distorted by the war conditions imposed on us, and by the incalculable human, physical and psychological damage we have sustained.

Every year sees an increase in the number of countries that vote by an overwhelming majority to put an end to that dirty, savage and silent war. Yet the blockade not only remains in effect, but has been cruelly and arrogantly strengthened before the very eyes of the world, which remains hamstrung in the face of the power of the Empire.

Where are the courage and bravery that turned our species into a giant? Why should we tolerate the diplomacy of intimidation and blackmail? For how long will the world sit on its hands and watch so merciless a crime?

It was such impunity that gave free rein to those who expedited the enactment of the criminal Helms-Burton Act as a new escalation of the blockade and as additional and convincing proof of a threat that goes beyond all borders. It is extraterritorial from top to bottom, because it was conceived and implemented against another sovereign State, with which they

hypocritically maintain they are not at war; at the same time, it is extraterritorial against the rest of the world, upon which they are attempting to impose the narrow jurisdiction of a clumsy national legal artifice.

This abhorred and oft-condemned imperial recipe has not met with any actions forceful enough to stop it. Its adoption gave rise to other aberrations, such as the D'Amato-Kennedy Act; and state and federal legislation of the same kind proliferates in that country.

Similar measures already affect more than 35 sovereign States — that is, 2.3 billion people, accounting for 42 per cent of the world's population and a potential market of $790 billion. These data, provided by the United States President's Advisory Council on Export Control and the American Institute for International Economy, prove that such extraterritorial policies also result in harm to the American people themselves, who in one year alone lost half a million jobs and more than $1 billion in salaries because of them.

Insane politicians and legislators end up by restricting the very values of freedom upon which that great country was founded and, in its name, prevent millions of American youth from gaining access to information about a world festival of youth and students held in Havana last summer. Those who attempt today to cross that new iron curtain risk $250,000 dollar fines and up to 10 years in prison. Despite those threats, about a thousand young men and women from the United States challenged the veto on their freedom — no one could prevent them — and attended the Havana festival anyway.

Such policies and concepts also affect the vast majority of our countrymen living in the United States, for years victims of criminal organizations and their hirelings based in Miami, used in the dirtiest deals and electoral manoeuvres, and even used as cannon fodder against their own people and their own motherland. Among them, a silent majority of immigrants is emerging ever stronger every day, rejecting the genocide against their motherland.

Despite all this, the raving obsession of the reactionary circles never seems to stop, as a true tyranny attempts increasingly to reach out for the goal of world power.

Today, new bills are being debated in the Congress in Washington, blooming under the shelter of instruments already approved in the Helms-Burton legal atrocity.

Today, independent nations are being bullied every six months so that they can obtain a sovereignty certificate from the White House Oval Office to avoid retaliation for their relations with Cuba.

Today, attempts to curb free trade with false excuses of national security are jolting the newly born World Trade Organization, and their doubtful seriousness begins to worry the most distinguished United States authorities.

Today, deals are made behind the backs of peoples, Governments and Parliaments to impose moratoriums on investments, and secret pseudo-legal arguments, based on dubious morality, are concocted to disguise the shamelessness of those who yield to pressure.

Today, there are blacklists of foreign companies and businessmen who do not submit to the rules, therefore being denied entry to that country, which regards itself as super-free. Visas are also denied to their spouses and children, to force them to yield to the empire's will.

Today, there are Governments that receive or await certificates of good democratic behaviour, certificates that they are defenders of selected and manipulated rights or are outstanding anti-drug enforcers, in order to gain access to a fast track to a free trade agreement, a trade credit or development aid.

Today, European citizens are being blackmailed by attorneys, indicted and unjustly found guilty by United States courts, which boast about their impartiality, under such illegalities as the Helms-Burton Act.

Today, there are imperialist diplomats, clones of policemen, who share the stage with famous Hollywood stars and who parade arrogantly among the Governments and Parliaments of the world, with their siren song and their well-known threats and offers of charity in exchange for the most abject complicity.

All of this madness has revived official and covert operations, mercenaries, spies and assassins, as ready now as in the worst days of the cold war to plot and unleash terror against human beings and even employ aggressive biological agents against our economy.

No one, absolutely no one, has lifted a finger in the United States Government to stop them. Diehard sectors have usurped their constitutional rights in order to exercise that power, and are obstructing them in the meanest and pettiest way.

The same gang of ultraconservatives and gangsters is responsible for the acquittal of hijackers and impedes the use of the term "terrorists", while with a silent and mysterious complicity they are bolstered, funded, organized, armed, trained and assigned to intelligence missions.

Disguised as tourists, defenders of human rights or philanthropists, those who today stir up greater and more painful confrontations between Cuba and the United States are identical to those who 35 years ago were involved in the climate of aggression which led to the missile crisis in October 1962.

Unfortunately, there are people in the world who do not see, or, even worse, do not want to see, these facts, and from their sanctuaries they worry about our problems, study us, advise us to surrender, design our future with the same ingredients as our past, and even urge us to bear everything with the utmost patience.

Believe me, it is very hard to understand, for example, the uneasiness caused by the lack of a variety of dishes on the Cuban table, when there is not the least concern for the millions of human beings to their south without tables or dishes, and often without even a slice of bread. We shall never understand or accept the longed-for renunciation of what we are and what we have been as the contemptible price that the people of socialist Cuba, like any other people in the world, should pay for an uncertain coexistence with a neighbour as disrespectful and arrogant as it is powerful.

The moral and legal support of 136 votes in this Assembly encourages and comforts us in our struggle. But it has not been enough to overcome the persistent arrogance of the one who thinks himself the divine judge and lacks the humility to admit the failure of a mistaken policy.

Although their representatives may, as usual, leave the Chamber, we know they are listening. Therefore, on behalf of the people of free Cuba we wish them to know and to convey to their Government and Congress that we have absolutely no fear of them.

We also know that only international pressure can prevent these forms of aggression against Cuba, or any other sovereign State, from multiplying.

For these reasons, and because of our commitment to the millions of Cubans whom we represent and on whose behalf we now speak, we confirm that if our stubborn will to resist costs us our lives, so be it a thousand times over. Never shall we submit again to being slaves of a haughty and arrogant empire that refuses to recognize pluralism or boundaries, an empire that decides to blockade our existence and kill all hope.

Our experience confirms to us today, more than ever, that only the spirit of sacrifice, the loving, valiant, free and selfless unity of our people and Government, can give us the strength of character of Quixote to stand up to such gigantic hardships.

That is how we have been able to resist, along with the most generous solidarity and understanding of thousands of millions of people.

Desiring only the noblest satisfaction, our people volunteer and join in the titanic task of putting an end to the cataclysms shaking the Earth and fighting for the advent of a new millennium of emancipation, peace, security and development for all nations.

We ask for nothing, absolutely nothing, in return.

We can only offer the example of having stoically endured the harassment of the greatest Power in history, of maintaining our principles and of continuing to believe, work and move forward when many thought we had stopped and were dying.

The father of our independence said,

> "We Cubans do not seek and do not want anything greater than honour, homeland and freedom. Everything else will come for sure and in bulk after all that. What we need is to succeed."

And our existence today is reason enough for us to assert proudly that we have already succeeded.

Because of that unique experience, we can also say that this is a solemn and decisive time.

The imperial Power that wants to subjugate the world is no match for us if we stand together.

We are a great and very powerful majority.

There will be no place in history for those who stay on their knees. Let us all rise, united!

The meeting rose at 1.55 p.m.